PERSPECTIVES ON SEXUAL ASSAULT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RURAL ALASKAN COMMUNITIES

by

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Abstract

Alaska's rate of reported sexual assault is nearly three times the national average, and underreporting may be as high as 70 percent. In rural communities, the rates of both sexual and domestic violence are higher still. Through oral history methodology my research explores how survivors, elders, and professionals view the issues surrounding this violence in remote communities. My findings highlight the interconnectedness of social problems, and the conditions within rural Alaskan communities that hinder reducing these problems. The variables associated with sexual and domestic violence that my respondents highlighted include: alcohol abuse, multigenerational trauma, lack of funding for services, isolation, and normalization of sexual assault and domestic violence.

Based on my analysis of the interviews, I have suggested recommendations that I believe are attainable for professional offices in rural Alaska, and that may help them provide better quality services to their communities. These recommendations include: 1) social abuse and crisis training for rural paraprofessionals; 2) socio-cultural training for frontline professional workers, to educate them not only on the history of the region in which they work, but also on the interconnected and long-lasting effects of sexual and domestic violence; and 3) improved communication between rural Alaskan communities and the state agencies that serve them, possibly via a cultural liaison. I also urge public and rural education initiatives, both in schools and to the public at large, regarding the long term, complex, and multigenerational effects of sexual and domestic violence and alcohol abuse.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Sexual and domestic violence crimes are startlingly common across the state of Alaska, and they produce complex, long-lasting effects. According to the University of Alaska Justice Center's 2015 Alaska Victimization Survey, 40.4 percent of adult women in Alaska have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetimes; 39.6 percent have experienced physical violence; and 23.5 percent have experienced at least one incident of forcible sexual assault.[1] This places Alaska's sexual assault rate at nearly three times the national average, with the child sexual assault rates at six times the national average. However, rates of reporting for sexual assault are notoriously low.[2] Susan H. Lewis, who has studied the peculiar circumstances surrounding the incidence of rape in rural America, reports that the nationwide estimate of unreported sexual assaults is as high as 70 percent, with the problem compounded in rural communities.[3] Much of the State of Alaska consists of such rural areas. The UAA Justice Center publication "Police Presence, Isolation, & Sexual Assault Prosecution" reports that nearly one quarter of Alaska's population lives in remote areas, for this purpose defined as those that are not accessible by the state highway system.[4] Just 50,000 Alaskans live in areas that span more than 400,000 square miles, for a population density of 0.13 per square mile.[5] These remote areas experience some of the highest rates of domestic violence and sexual assault in the state.[6]

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[1] *Alaska Victimization Survey*, (Anchorage, Alaska: University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center, February 26, 2016), http://uaajusticecenter.blogspot.com/2016/02/alaska-victimization-survey-results.html.
[2] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.
[3] Susan H. Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes: Sexual Assault in Rural America* (Enola, Pennsylvania: National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2003), 3. http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Booklets_Unspoken-Crimes-Sexual-Assault-in-Rural-America%20.pdf.
[4] Darryl S.Wood et al., "Police Presence, Isolation, & Sexual Assault Prosecution," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 22, no. 3 (2011): 332, DOI: 10.1177/0887403410375980.
[5] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 332.
[6] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 11.

Furthermore, communities of this size are often close-knit, and Lewis states that this can lead victims to refrain from reporting for fear of upsetting the locality's social balance.

I grew up in the rural and isolated community of Lake Minchumina, Alaska. When I was a child, our community boasted as many as forty people during the summer, although by the time my family moved to Anchorage when I was fourteen, we had shrunk to fifteen in number. This community, like many in rural Alaska, was only accessible via airplane, boat, or snow machine. Fairbanks, the nearest city, was an hour plane flight away in good weather, but we were often "weathered in," unable to access town amenities such as grocery stores or doctors for days or weeks on end. To travel there by boat or snow machine could take as long as a week. Our community was lucky, and we rarely had reason to call law enforcement. However, it was common knowledge that if we needed them, the State Troopers were a call, plane flight, and lucky weather conditions away.

I earned my undergraduate degree in Biology from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2012. In the summers of 2013 and 2014, I worked on two fish weirs for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game near the Kuskokwim River. While doing this work, I began to make friends with women with whom I worked, and with families in villages near my camp. After getting to know me, some began to speak to me about their experiences with domestic violence and sexual assault. Their stories were disturbing and sad, and these victims often discussed multiple generations of abuse in their families. They told me how they could not speak to their family members who might blame them, and how they did not want to get their abusers in trouble but did not know how to deal with their feelings of inadequacy and pain. These victims often felt alone, ashamed and even guilty, as survivors of such crimes so often do. As I saw it, the cases were complicated by the abuser often being a close relative, a friend, or a pillar of the

community. Further, if the case was not reported and the perpetrator remained in the community, the victim often lived near the assailant, which perpetuated the shame and isolation that surrounds these crimes. In thinking about this epidemic of sexual assault in rural communities, I came to believe that this silence allows the abuse to continue. Additionally, I now recognize that the silence surrounding these traumatic events keeps victims from identifying resources rural communities need to support survivor recovery. By providing survivors of domestic and sexual violence a platform to speak from, I believe that rural Alaska can begin to move in the direction of healing. To aid survivors in telling their stories, I returned to school and entered the Arctic and Northern Studies program, where I learned the best methods to conduct interviews with survivors of trauma. In the year of 2016, I traveled to two rural communities in western Alaska, and interviewed survivors, elders, and professionals in the field of domestic violence and sexual assault, using oral history methodology. Although my project was ruled exempt from review by UAF's Institutional Review Board (IRB), due to my use of oral history methodology, I followed IRB protocols, as well as the requirements of the Oral History Association (OHA).

I began my project with the goal to fill the gap in the literature on sexual and domestic violence with the voices of survivors of these crimes, knowing that survivors would have unique insight not only on the short- and long-term impacts of these offenses, but on factors contributing to the violence and the silence that surrounds it. However, upon arriving at one of my study sites I realized that I had a unique opportunity not only to interview survivors of sexual and domestic violence, but to speak with professionals and elders on the topics. Thus, I interviewed and audio recorded conversations with survivors, elders and professionals in the fields of sexual assault and domestic violence. My primary goal has remained to give survivors of sexual assault and

domestic violence a platform to speak openly about their experiences living in small communities, often near the perpetrator of the crime. My research questions became:

1) What do survivors want others to know about how this experience has affected them?
2) What are the differences and similarities between how survivors, elders, and professionals view the issues of sexual assault and domestic violence in small, remote communities?
3) How do survivors, elders and professionals compare and differ on topics concerning intervention strategies, help strategies, and the circumstances that have contributed to such high rates of both crimes in rural Alaska?

I interviewed fourteen individuals. Some of these were elders, some survivors, some advocates for victims of sexual and/ domestic violence, and some were all three. All told, I interviewed six survivors, of whom five were female and one male; eight advocates; five elders; one Alaska State Trooper; and one Assistant District Attorney. Following these interviews, I transcribed each individual's interview for analysis.

The most prominent themes that my research has revealed are the interrelatedness of social problems and conditions within rural Alaskan communities that hinder reducing these problems. One issue cannot be addressed without encountering another, equally important issue. The respondents with whom I spoke highlighted the interconnectedness of contributing variables including: sexual assault, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, multigenerational trauma, lack of funding for services, isolation, and normalization of sexual assault and domestic violence (Fig 1).

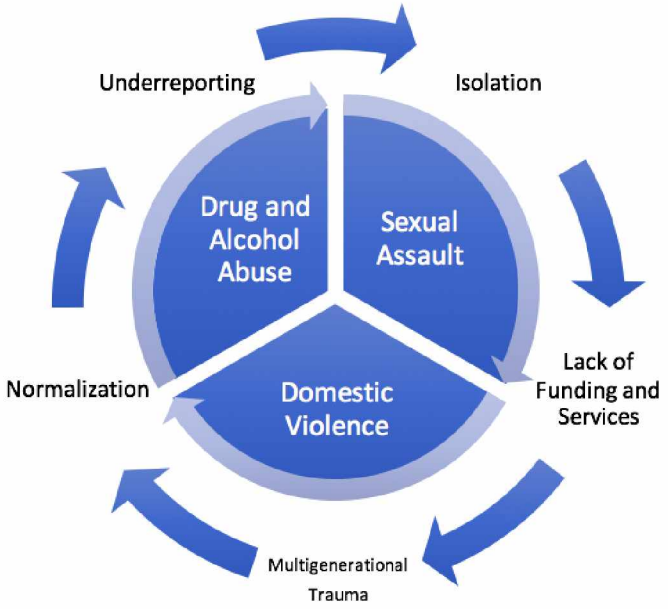

Figure 1: Interconnectness

I explore the interconnectedness of these social problems in the following five chapters.

Chapter 2, Literature Review and Methodology, examines the published research on the topic of sexual assault and domestic violence in rural Alaskan communities. To highlight this issue, I first examine the issues of sexual and domestic violence on a national level, identifying sexual assault rates, prosecution rates, and barriers to reporting across the United States; I then narrow the discussion to the conditions of rural communities nationwide that further hinder reporting and prosecution of perpetrators of such acts; finally, I discuss the how these factors relate to rural Alaskan communities, which experience the highest rates of sexual assault and domestic violence nationwide. I then provide an explanation of my research methodology and a methodology literature review, along with an in-depth description of my research process. I do not present an extant review of the literature on sexual and domestic violence; I treat the literature sufficiently to lay the groundwork for explaining the complicated phenomena

surrounding social problems seen in many rural Alaskan communities. In future chapters I integrate other literature as it relates to my findings.

Chapter 3, Survivors' Perspectives, presents and explores the experiences and insights of the six survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence I interviewed. In this chapter, I chose to emphasize their stories, to validate their words and experiences, rather than discussing solutions they suggested. The themes that emerged from my interviews with survivors included: substance abuse as a complicating factor to sexual and domestic violence; both geographic isolation of the communities where survivors resided and social isolation they experienced within their communities following the assaults; normalization of such acts of violence by friends, family, and community members; cyclicality of both sexual and domestic violence; and ways that these survivors moved forward with their lives following these traumatic incidences.

Chapter 4, Professionals' Perspectives on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence in Rural Alaska, presents and analyzes my interviews with professionals in the field of sexual assault and domestic violence in rural Alaska. The themes that emerged from these interviews overlapped with those in survivors' interviews, on the topics of isolation, normalization, substance abuse, and the cyclicality of these violent crimes. However, professionals additionally discussed the unique difficulties that they face in serving a large number of communities spread over a vast expanse of land. These difficulties include understaffing and underfunding of their offices; the transiency of the workforce in rural professional offices; the general dearth of services available for victims of sexual and domestic violence; and the disconnect between the perceptions, values and expectations of state professionals and residents of the rural communities they serve.

Chapter 5, Discussion, I explore the congruity and divergences in professionals' and survivors' analysis of the causes and contributing factors to sexual and domestic violence. I then

discuss survivors' concerns and perspectives regarding state services provided and their suggestions. Based on insight drawn from my respondents, I then offer practical recommendations for professional offices in rural Alaska and that may improve the quality of services to rural communities. These solutions include: 1) social abuse and crisis training for rural paraprofessionals; 2) socio-cultural training for frontline professional workers, such as lawyers and medical professionals, to educate them not only on the history of the region, but also on the interconnected and long-lasting effects of sexual and domestic violence; 3) improved communication between rural Alaska communities and the state agencies that serve them, possibly via a cultural liaison; 4) public education concerning the long term, complex, and multigenerational effects of sexual and domestic violence; and 5) rural community education initiatives that emphasize the effects and interrelatedness of sexual and domestic violence and substance abuse, as well as preventative measures and proactive solutions.

Finally, my Conclusion summarizes my research process, findings, and recommendations. This chapter emphasizes the interconnectedness of the social problems that exist in some rural Alaskan communities.

It is important to note that my findings do not necessarily apply to rural communities as a whole, nor do they apply to all survivors of sexual and domestic violence. Nevertheless, these individuals' personal and professional experiences provide them valuable insight into conditions in rural communities that contribute to high rates of sexual and domestic violence. I believe the testimony of both survivors and professionals has helped illuminate steps that can be taken to provide aid for survivors, and lessen the stigma they often face. I hope that their voices, along with my analysis, will contribute to the reduction of this pervasive violence and to improved individual and community well-being in rural Alaska.

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Methodology

2.1 Literature Review

This literature review subdivides the extensive literature on sexual and domestic violence on which this thesis relies, first into sexual assault and domestic violence on a national level, then to rural areas nationally, and finally to rural Alaska.

2.1.1 The United States:

Sexual assault and domestic violence plague all areas of the world, and are startlingly prevalent across the United States. According to the White House Council on Women and Girls, nearly one in five women and one in seventy-one men have been sexually assaulted in their lifetimes.[1] The White House reports that most incidents of sexual assault were perpetrated by either a former intimate partner or an acquaintance. In urban locations, the incidences of stranger-assault are higher than in rural communities.[2] Over 25 percent of men who report having been victims of assault said the incident occurred before age ten; nearly 50 percent of women who reported having been assaulted said the incident(s) occurred before they reached the age of eighteen.[3]

The effects of sexual assault are long lasting and multi-faceted. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) reports that victims of sexual abuse are three times more likely than others to suffer from depression, six times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic

[1] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action*, Washington, DC: White House Council on Women and Girls, Office of the Vice President, January 2014, 9: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/sexual_assault_report_1-21-14.pdf
[2] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 9.
[3] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 20.

stress disorder, thirteen times more likely to abuse alcohol, twenty-six times more likely to abuse drugs, and four times more likely to contemplate suicide.[4]

Despite the high rates of sexual and domestic violence, arrest rates are remarkably low. The White House Council on Women and Girls cites one of the reasons for this: "some police officers still believe certain rape myths (e.g., that many women falsely claim rape to get attention). Similarly if victims do not behave in the way some police officers expect (e.g. crying) an officer may believe she is making a false report – when, in reality, only 2-10% of reported rapes are false."[5] It is important to note here that reactions to traumatic events vary among individuals.[6] While some victims display behaviors clearly associated with trauma, such overt anxiety, effects are "variable and specific to the individual; both psychological and physiological responses can vary widely," according to experts.[7] Thus, the failure of some law enforcement officials to recognize the wide range of trauma responses that victims display may lead to the general dearth of sexual assault arrests and cases prosecuted in the United States. The White House Council on Women and Girls indicated that two-thirds of survivors have their legal cases against perpetrators dismissed, and more than 80 percent of the time the dismissal contradicts her desire to prosecute and have the case brought to justice.[8]

A February 2017 article in the *Alaska Dispatch* reports that the high case dismissal rate is at least in part due to the sexual assault kit backlog that numbers over 400,000 across the nation.[9]

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[4] Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, "Effects of Sexual Violence," under "About Sexual Assault," https://rainn.org/.
[5] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 16.
[6] Institute of Medicine, *Understanding the Psychological Consequences of Traumatic Events, Disasters, and Terrorism*, in *Preparing for the Psychological Consequences of Terrorism: A Public Healthy Strategy*, Stith A Butler, AM Panzer, and LR Goldfrank, (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2003), 35, DOI: https://doi.org/10.17226/10717.
[7] Institute of Medicine, *Understanding the Psychological Consequences,* 2003, 35.
[8] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 17.
[9] Jill Burke, "By Bringing Forgotten Rape Kits Out of Storage, Alaska May Deliver Long-Overdue Justice," *Alaska*

Sexual assault kits take DNA evidence from victims following assaults, to assist law enforcement in identifying the perpetrators. Without DNA evidence, prosecuting crimes of this nature can be difficult, because the case then relies on the testimony of the survivors, which the accused usually refutes.[10] The DNA backlog currently houses evidence of crimes that occurred up to thirty-three years ago nationally, and has seriously hindered apprehending perpetrators.[11] While it is unclear how this backlog developed, it may be associated with the high costs of processing, which can range from between $500 and $1,500 per kit.[12] Further, although it is now federal law under the Violence Against Women Act that each state pay for the collection and processing of sexual assault kits within their boundaries, some states still require victims to pay out of pocket for the examination.[13] For many victims, the thought of carrying the financial burden of their sexual assault in addition to the emotional and physical burdens they already bear is too much to endure; some choose not to have a sexual assault kit collected as a result.[14]

RAINN reports that low prosecution rates contribute to the reporting of only three hundred out of every one thousand rapes to authorities. Of those, fifty-seven arrests will be made. Of those, eleven will be referred to prosecution. Of those, seven cases will lead to a felony conviction. Of those, six will spend time behind bars.[15] A study by Susan Lewis reports that the need for documentation of injuries, DNA evidence, and community participation hinders

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Dispatch News, July 24, 2016.
[10] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 24.
[11] Burke, "By Bringing Forgotten Rape Kits Out of Storage," 2016.
[12] Burke, "By Bringing Forgotten Rape Kits Out of Storage," 2016.
[13] Patricia Williams, "Making Rape Victims Pay," *Human Rights Watch,* 2009; Kris Van Cleave, "For Some Sexual Assault Victims, Ordeal Carries a Price Tag," *CBS News,* November 12, 2014.
[14] Van Cleave, "Ordeal Carries a Price Tag," 2014.
[15] Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics," under "More Statistics," https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system.

prosecution of rape cases disproportionately in very rural America, where it can take hours, or even days, for law enforcement and medical care to arrive on the scene.[16]

2.1.2 Rural Communities

According to Susan H. Lewis, who studied the peculiar circumstances surrounding the incidence of rape in rural America, the nationwide estimate of unreported sexual assaults is as high as 70 percent, with the problem compounded in rural communities.[17] The U.S. Department of Agriculture and Economic Research Services classifies rural towns as those with fewer than 2,500 people within their boundaries, and with a population density that is no more than 35 people per square mile.[18] Communities of this size are often close-knit nature, and Lewis argues that this can lead victims to refrain from reporting for fear of upsetting the town's social balance. Many survivors hesitate to contact their local police departments with reports of sexual assault or domestic violence due social interconnections between the survivor and the assailant, and/or local law enforcement.[19] Further, Lewis notes, "the closer the relationship between victim and assailant, the less likely the woman is to report the crime."[20] In rural communities, where everyone is interconnected, stepping forward can be a daunting task, especially when the crime is both shame-based and isolating in nature, as sexual assault inevitably is.[21] In small communities,

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[16] Darryl S. Wood, et al., "Police Presence, Isolation, & Sexual Assault Prosecution," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 22, no. 3 (2011): 334, DOI: 10.1177/0887403410375980.
[17] Susan H. Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes: Sexual assault in Rural America* (Enola, Pennsylvania: National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2003), 3, http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Booklets_Unspoken-Crimes-Sexual-Assault-in-Rural-America%20.pdf.
[14] USDA Rural Information Center: National Agricultural Library, "What Is Rural?" under "Introduction to What is Rural," *U.S. Rural Information Center* (Beltsville, MD May, 2016), https://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/what-is-rural.
[19] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 4.
[20] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 3.
[21] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 3.

where regular encounters with the perpetrator can be anticipated, survivors often choose to remain quiet about the incident.

Despite the underreporting of sexual and domestic assault to authorities in rural communities, rural areas consistently exhibit higher rates of sexual assault and domestic violence.[22] Susan Lewis's study comparing rural, isolated communities to urban ones in Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Alaska, revealed consistently higher rates of sexual assault in rural communities. Similarly, in Judy Shepherd's article "Where Do You Go When It's Forty Below" about sexual and domestic violence in rural Alaska, she cited a study done in rural Kentucky that found high rates of sexual and domestic violence, with correspondingly high rates of underreporting within such rural areas. Shepherd quotes the study:

> From a woman's perspective, a mosaic of problems exist when it comes to the state's contributing various services to rural women. Some of the difficulties stem from the remoteness of the region and the sociopolitical and physical isolation of the women. Other problems emerge because of the lack of privacy in rural areas and the interconnections between those who provide services and those who consume them. Still more problems arise from the generalized dearth of state services in rural communities brought about by a combination of factors including the inability of the state to infiltrate or access rural communities.[23]

These challenges characterize rural communities, regardless of community demographics or geopolitical location.

In northern rural areas, remoteness and community interconnectedness are further pronounced, because many northern towns lie off the road system; access may require a boat, snow machine, or airplane.[24] Canadian researchers Moffitt and Fikowski conducted research on

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[22] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 9-11, 14.
[23] N. Websdale, *Rural Woman Battering and the Justice System: An Ethnography,* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), xxx, quoted in Judy Shepherd, "Where Do You Go When It's 40 Below? Domestic Violence Among Rural Alaska Native Women," *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 16, no. 4 (2001): 497.
[24] Pertice Moffitt and Heather Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence:

intimate partner violence in northern Canada. They held several focus groups in two northern communities in the Northwest Territories over the course of six years. They found that violence in these communities had become so pervasive that it was "normal, accepted, and expected," with one focus group participant relating that "it's just a way of life."[25] In rural Alaska, similar attitudes prevail, owing to the isolation of many villages, the lack of law enforcement in rural areas, and the close ties of community members.

2.1.3 Rural Alaska: Statistics and Law and Order

According to the University of Alaska Justice Center's 2015 Alaska Victimization Survey, 40.4 percent of adult women in Alaska have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetimes; 39.6 percent have experienced physical violence; and 23.5 percent have experienced at least one incident of forcible sexual assault.[26] This places Alaska's sexual assault rate at nearly three times the national average, with child sexual assault rates six times the national average.[27]

According to the UAA Justice Center publication "Police Presence, Isolation, & Sexual Assault Prosecution," just under one quarter of Alaska's population lives in remote areas, for this purpose defined as those that are not accessible by the state highway system.[28] In these areas, over fifty thousand Alaskans live in areas that span more than 400,000 square miles, for a population density of 0.13 per square mile.[29] These remote areas experience some of the highest

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Two Community Narratives," *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Community Research Alliance (*2016): 5.

[25] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 5.

[26] *Alaska Victimization Survey*, (Anchorage, Alaska: University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center, February 26, 2016), http://uaajusticecenter.blogspot.com/2016/02/alaska-victimization-survey-results.html.

[27] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.

[28] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 332.

[29] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 332.

rates of domestic violence and sexual assault in the state, with the Department of Public Safety reporting that western Alaska has nearly twice the level of felony sexual offenses per capita of any other region with correspondingly low population rates.[30]

In 2012, Laura Johnson found in her publication "Frontier of Injustice: Alaska Native Victims of Domestic Violence," that 30 percent of Alaskan women live outside of victim services.[31] Furthermore, she explains that depending on weather conditions, it can take between one and six days for Alaska State Troopers to arrive on the scene of a crime in isolated fly-in only communities.[32] This means that victims of sexual assault or domestic violence crime may have to wait hours or days for law enforcement personnel to arrive. Upon their arrival, authorities will collect evidence from the crime scene, if any is left, and ask the victim if he or she wants to return to a hub-community to have a sexual assault kit collected. Upon consent, the state will fly the victim to the closest hub-community to await the attention of a forensic nurse. This wait can take many hours, during which time he or she is discouraged from urinating or washing.[33] The collection of a sexual assault kit can be traumatizing to the victim, often takes several hours to complete, and involves photographs, measurements, and swabbing of genital areas.[34] This entire process, depending on the weather conditions, remoteness of the community in which the crime takes place, and the availability of a forensic nurse, can take between one day and a week to complete. Moreover, there is no guarantee that this evidence will be used to

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[30] U.S. Department of Public Safety: "Crime in Alaska Supplemental Report: 2016 Felony Level Sexual Offences," under "Incidents and Rates by Region," Christen Spears and Kathryn Monfreda, (Anchorage, Alaska: October 26, 2016), 5, https://dps.alaska.gov/getmedia/0637d6db-11f0-4d61-88a9-2d94a8e48547/2016-felony-level-sex-offenses-final-locked;.aspx.

[31] Laura S. Johnson, "Frontier of Injustice: Alaska Native Victims of Domestic Violence," *The Modern American*, 8 (2012): 2, http://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1168&context=tma.

[32] Johnson, "Frontier of Injustice," 3.

[33] Shannyn Moore, "Rape Kit Backlog Reflects Failure of Justice in Alaska," *Alaska Dispatch News,* September 3, 2016.

[34] Moore, "Rape Kit Backlog," 2016.

convict the perpetrator. In 2015 Alaska Governor Bill Walker ordered an audit of the sexual assault kits in Alaska and found that over 3,600 kits had never been processed, with some kits reaching back as far as the 1980s.[35] With justice for remote community members so difficult to achieve, involving long waits, invasive procedures, and uncertain case processing, it is little wonder that sexual assault cases are underreported.

Owing to rural Alaska's isolation from population centers with law enforcement services, accessing any form of law enforcement can be difficult. The *Criminal Justice Policy Review* reports that 25.5 percent of people who reside in remote communities in Alaska are served locally by a police department or Alaska State Trooper post; 57.6 percent reside in villages served by a Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO), Village Police Officer (VPO), or Tribal Police Officer (TPO); and 16.9 percent reside in villages served by no local public safety presence.[36] However, VPSOs, VPOs and TPOs are paraprofessionals, who often serve the village in which they live. VPSOs do not have the same legal standing as police officers, but instead are trained in "basic criminal law and arrest procedures, rural fire fighting, and emergency responder first aid;" they are not recognized peace officers, and have the same legal standing as a private citizen.[37]

Wood, Rosay, Postel and TePas explain that VPSO and VPO programs are not meant to produce peace officers, but are instead intended to train local community members to act as "trip wires" for the State Troopers in cases of violent or serious cases, and to manage minor crimes locally. In this way, they can alert their regional State Trooper department should a serious crime occur. While this is the case for VPOs, who receive just two weeks of training and are not

[35] Burke, "Forgotten Rape Kits," 2016.
[36] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 331.
[37] Johnson, "Frontier of Injustice," 7.

required to have a high school diploma or a GED, VPSOs carry more responsibility.[38] *Alaska Dispatch News* journalist Lisa Demer notes that while training for VPSOs is increasing, now requiring them to meet the similar requirements as Alaska State Troopers, they do not have the same authority. The fifty-three VPSOs in Alaska in 2017 shoulder a high level of responsibility, without the authority to carry a fire arm.[39] In 2014, following the shooting of a VPSO who responded to a report of a suicidal man in Manokotak, the Alaska Legislature approved a bill to allow VPSOs to carry firearms. However, three years later, the regulatory details required to arm the VPSOs have not been finalized. Meanwhile, VPSO numbers have dropped from 101 across Alaska to 53, despite Governor Walker's doubling of the number of VPSO positions in 2014.[40]

The presence of VPSOs in villages has both positive and negative impacts. Some studies suggest that having a VPSO as the first responder to a domestic violence or sexual assault case leads to underreporting, due to the close-knit social connections in small communities, which discourage victims from reporting relatives and friends. Moreover, these same close relations may lead local police to "care more about maintaining friendly community relations than pursuing justice," writes Susan Lewis.[41] However, Wood, Rosay, Postle and TePas found that communities isolated from an Alaska State Trooper post (only accessible by boat or airplane) had a 2.5 greater chance of having sexual or domestic violence cases referred for prosecution than those on the road system and accessible by car. Furthermore, there was a three-times-greater chance of having a case accepted for prosecution when a VPSO, VPO or TPO was present and

[38] Wood et al, "Police Presence," 332.
[39] Lisa Demer, "As Alaska Struggles to Fill VPSO Ranks, the Officers Remain Unarmed for Now," *Alaska Dispatch News*, February 11, 2017.
[40] Demer, "As Alaska Struggles to Fill VPSO Ranks," 2017.
[41] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 4.

the victim was compliant with law enforcement officials.[42] It is important to note here, however, that this report examined only cases that were reported to Alaska State Troopers, and they included only women over the age of 18. This is a serious limitation when considering that 94 percent of sexual assault cases reported to Alaska State Troopers involved girls under the age of 18.[43] Further, this report did not delineate among paraprofessionals (VPOs or VPSOs) which, due to the drastically different training requirements, could lead to different outcomes. Despite these limitations, the statistics for prosecution in rural communities look encouraging. The researchers speculate that that the higher referral rate may be due to Alaska State Troopers knowing that returning to the isolated village would be cost-prohibitive, and thus may induce troopers to be more thorough in their investigations.[44] Investigators further speculate that the higher prosecution rates may result from VPSOs' and VPOs' ability to secure witness and victim cooperation, which is highly correlated with cases being accepted by prosecutors.[45] Moreover, local para-professionals can stand guard over the crime scene to ensure that no evidence is altered or destroyed, and that the perpetrator does not escape. They can also provide information about individual and home locations, and help secure participation of witnesses and victims due to their local knowledge and the trust they have built through residing within the community.[46] Such trust is especially important, considering the tendency in small communities to be suspicious of outsiders, as discussed further below.

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[42] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 340.
[43] Craig Medred, "What Will It Take to Shine a Light on Rural Alaska's Sexual Assault Epidemic?" *Alaska Dispatch News,* March 26, 2013.
[44] Wood et al, "Police Presence," 342.
[45] Wood et al, "Police Presence," 341.
[46] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 344.

The isolated nature of many remote Alaskan villages may not only allow local perpetrators to further isolate victims, but may attract and protect criminals.[47] Owing to the seasonal nature of many employment opportunities in Alaska, such as those in the construction and fishing industries, it can be easy for someone to commit a sexual or violent crime and escape before it is reported.[48] Such cases can entrench rural communities' distrust of outsiders. When a non-local professional, such as a State Trooper or a nurse, then arrives on the scene of a crime, he or she is often met with resistance and suspicion. This can hinder prosecution due to lack of victim and/or witness cooperation. Sara Bernard writes in an *Atlantic* article about what she terms the "rape culture" in rural Alaska: "'The word for 'trooper', according to Alaska State Trooper Lieutenant Andrew Merrill, 'translates in nearly every language in Western Alaska as 'he who comes and takes away.'"[49]

Survivors' hesitation to step forward often relates to the complex web of social connections in remote communities that can lead people to step carefully to avoid angering one another. Implicating a person of a crime could mean implicating a friend, a neighbor, or a family member, which in turn could lead to his or her removal from the community and "could mean that the family income and viability would be reduced significantly, or, in the case of very rural Alaska, reporting may literally lead to the removal of the family food getter," explains Susan Lewis.[50] Similarly, Alaska Trooper, Lieutenant Merrill told to journalist Sara Bernard that the perpetrator

[47] Sara Bernard, "Rape Culture in the Alaskan Wilderness," *The Atlantic,* September 11, 2014.
[48] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 2014.
[49] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 2014.
[50] Lewis, *Unspoken crimes,* 6.

is often "the one who chops wood, hauls the water, hunts the caribou so there's food in the house. So it's like 'yeah, he punched me, and yeah, I want this to stop, but I need to survive.'"[51]

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "the victim-offender relationship is important in predicting reporting [of sexual assault]"[52] Judy Shepherd notes: "the strong value placed on family can make it difficult for abused women to seek help."[53] When relations are this complex, stemming not only from the need to eat and live, but also from an urge to love, accept and forgive loved ones, the impediments to reporting sexual and domestic violence can be insurmountable. Such impediments to reporting these crimes contributes to normalization or seeming acquiescence in such abuse. However, in some rural locations normalization of such violent acts may be misconstrued into overt acceptance of the perpetrators and dismissal of victims.

2.1.4 Rural Alaska: Acceptance

Some research suggests that rural areas are more permissive or accepting of sexual assault than urban ones. Susan Lewis reports that "one underlying value in many rural communities stresses the importance of family reputation over personal justice, even over personal safety . . . in very isolated areas, attitudes toward sexual assault may appear relatively accepting."[54] Judy Shepherd argues that part of the barrier to speaking out stems from the community values of family and forgiveness often embraced in rural communities.[55] In Shepherd's study, in which she interviewed eight survivors of domestic violence in a rural Alaskan community, many of the

[51] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 2014.
[52] Lewis, "Unspoken crimes," 8.
[53] Shepherd, "Where Do You Go," 505.
[54] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 2014.
[55] Shepherd, "Where Do You Go," 505.

women reported that while they wanted the violence to end, they did not wish to see their partners or family members spend time in jail. Sara Bernard's research supports this finding. She relates the story of "Jane," a young girl whose father attempted to molest her while drinking one night. When a State Trooper later asked her why she did not report him to the authorities, she replied "you do realize he raised me."[56] Elise Patkotak, a resident of Barrow, Alaska, explains that: "families, in order to survive, have to get along with all the other families . . . in small villages where everyone is related . . . any breach of these relationships can be devastating."[57] Living in small, close-knit communities has resulted in what is commonly referred to as a culture of non-interference, wherein people hesitate to intervene in "other people's business."[58]

The need for positive community relations can result in pressure against interjecting oneself in disputes or speaking out against wrongs committed against oneself or others. Cynthia Erickson, resident of Tanana, in Interior Alaska, states in Bernard's article, "Everybody knows who's doing what. It's common river knowledge. Who's the molester. Who's the abuser."[59] These incidents are not reported due to the tight social interrelations within rural communities. Families "struggle to protect one another and their lives go forward," writes Bernard. They know "that anyone they offend will be at the post office the next day, and the day after, and the day after that," so they stifle objections to avoid the discomfort or potential danger of confrontation.[60] This level of conflict avoidance may contribute to seemingly high levels of acceptance of harmful

[56] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 2014.
[57] Elise Sereni Patkotak, "Village Violence," *Alaska Women Speak* 11, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 14.
[58] Wendy Hanford Arundale, "The Healing Constellation: A Conceptual Framework for Treating Trauma among Athabaskan Women in Alaska" (PhD diss., University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2005), 15.
[59] Arundale, "The Healing Constellation," 12.
[60] Arundale, "The Healing Constellation," 12.

behaviors, but it at least partially reflects norms that have developed to promote social order and cohesion in small, rural communities.

John Sutter, in his article "The Rapist Next Door," tells the story of an Alaska village that runs a state-funded reform program for convicted rapists. The program places offenders "right in the center" of a support circle, which consists mainly of volunteers who have survived sexual assault themselves.[61] The program rests on "two concepts dear to local indigenous culture: community and forgiveness," Sutter writes. But more importantly, the program represents a practical response. Banishing and ostracizing perpetrators often places them in situations where they can reoffend. Keeping exposed offenders in the center of a village full of watchful eyes limits the likelihood of repeated sexual offenses. So far, the program appears to be working: of the ninety sex offenders served, only two have had known cases of sexual re-offense, for a recidivism rate of 0.02%. In contrast, a nation-wide study of 9,691 convicted sex offenders, found a recidivism rate of 5.3 percent in the first three years.[62] Alaska's program represents a restorative justice program, "the term coined to describe justice approaches that focus on reparation rather than retribution," as criminal justice professor Jeff May explains.[63] May writes that restorative justice "encourages victims, offenders, and communities to collectively identify harms, needs, and obligations in a unified effort to heal and put things right. This involvement empowers crime victims, helps offenders actively meet their obligation to make amends, and encourages community members to support victims and offenders in the reparation and healing process." May explains that interventions such as these are only feasible if both the victim and

[61] John D. Sutter, "The Rapist Next Door," *CNN,* 2013, http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2014/02/opinion/sutter-change-alaska-rape/.
[62] Sutter, "The Rapist Next Door," 2013.
[63] Jeff D. May, "Restorative Justice: Theory, Processes, and Application in Rural Alaska," *Alaska Justice Forum* 31, no. 3-4 (Fall 2014/Winter 2015): 2.

the perpetrator agree that restorative justice is the suitable course of action.[64] The values and principles at the core of restorative justice are not new concepts; historically many law enforcement paradigms across the world, especially within indigenous cultures, have incorporated them.[65] As such, the goals of restorative justice programs may be more closely aligned with Alaska Native values than Western justice system's emphasis on retribution.[66] However, the Alaska community in Sutter's story represents just one example, in comparison to the national recidivism study, and more research is needed to determine the effectiveness of such programs.

In some remote communities, the concepts of forgiveness and community cohesiveness have been contributed to complacency and implicit acceptance of sexual assault and domestic violence. This can extend to overtly blaming the victims, occasionally to the point of ostracizing them for speaking out.[67] Sutter's article illustrates such circumstances in the story of "Claire," a woman who had been abused as a child in a rural Alaska community: "at 16, Claire told a teacher – turned him in. But the community blamed her and her family disowned the high school girl. She has to wonder, now, if it's because she was a female and he was a male. She didn't work and he hunted and fished – provided not just for her family, but also for the entire Alaska Native Village. He was seen as valuable. She was not," Sutter writes.[68] In numerous cases, victims have had to leave the community because they have been "shamed and blamed."[69] Canadian researchers Moffitt and Fikowski report that in a remote northern community in the Northwest

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[64] May, "Restorative Justice," 2.
[65] Mark S. Umbreit, et al., "Restorative Justice in the Twenty-First Century: A Social Movement Full of Opportunities and Pitfalls," *Marquette Law Review* 89 (2005): 256.
[66] Umbreit et al., "Restorative Justice in the Twenty-First Century," 256.
[67] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 2014.
[68] Sutter, "The Rapist Next Door," 2013.
[69] Medred, "What Will It Take," 2016.

Territories: "Women find themselves in a double bind; those that try to speak out or leave their abusive relationships are, in turn abused by their community in a retaliatory manner. Participants [in focus groups] described this retribution as severe, long lasting, and a real threat to their sense of safety and security."[70] This retaliation correlates with and is complicated by high rates of drug and alcohol abuse by both perpetrators and victims in rural villages.[71]

Similarly, in Alaska alcohol abuse correlates with sexual and domestic violence. In some cases, individuals use alcohol to numb emotional pain related to myriad issues, instead of seeking help.[72] Using alcohol to numb emotions may cause healthier responses to emotional pain to atrophy, eventually leading to "physical, psychological, social, or economic problems," Sara Bernard reports.[73] Some of the most debilitating effects of alcohol abuse are the profound effects it can have on those surrounding the abuser, and the secondary pathologies it generates. Psychologist Wendy Arundale notes of Alaska Native women: "even if they themselves do not abuse alcohol . . . day in and day out Native women must live with the substance abuse around them in their families or communities, or both, and the homicides, suicides, domestic violence, child abuse, and other forms of community trauma that substance abuse helps spawn."[74] Moffitt and Fikowski suggest that some remote communities excuse the violent behavior of inebriated males, while simultaneously condemning women who choose to consume alcohol.[75] They state of this: "There are lethal acts of violence against women. When a woman is inebriated and passes out, participants describe that she is raped sometimes by more than one man and with

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[70] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 7.
[71] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 17.
[72] Paul C. Whitehead and Michael J. Hayes, *The Insanity of Alcohol: Social Problems in Canadian First Nations Communities,* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1998), 70.
[73] Whitehead and Hayes, "The Insanity of Alcohol," 70.
[74] Arundale, "The Healing Constellation," 142.
[75] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 19.

other men watching. These men take no responsibility for their actions. In fact, they allege that it is the woman's fault because she should not have been drinking. There is no demonstrated understanding that violence is a choice and that sexual acts require consent between two people."[76]

From the victim's standpoint, excessive drinking not only increases the risk of victimization, but it renders prosecution more difficult, because it clouds the victim's memory and reduces her credibility as a witness. Detective John Vandervalk, a sex crime detective with the Anchorage Police Department, reports that the average level of blood alcohol content for a victim during a rape exam is 0.21, which is over two and a half times the legal limit for driving. He stresses: "that's the average. We routinely have people in the high threes, fours, and fives, both on the suspect's side and on the victim's."[77] Moffitt and Fikowski found that in some remote communities, being sexually assaulted while drinking or unconscious is an "acceptable" risk of attending a party.[78] The relationship between alcohol abuse and sexual assault is complex and multifaceted, not only leading perpetrators and community members to blame victims of sexual assault who were inebriated, but leading victims to blame themselves.[79] Moreover, community members often know that male perpetrators may have also been victims of sexual and domestic violence, and thus interpret the perpetrator's drinking as a response to trauma he has experienced.[80]

[76] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 19.
[77] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 2014.
[78] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 19.
[79] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 19.
[80] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 6.

Research shows that many of the perpetrators of sexual violence crimes were once victims of sexual crimes themselves.[81] Nationally, approximately 30% of sexual offenders were themselves abused as children. While researching his publication "The Rapist Next Door," John Sutter interviewed Sheldon, a recovering rapist who was molested and raped himself as a child and as a teenager by both men and women in his village. When Sutter attended a rehabilitation meeting with Sheldon, he found that over half of the people in the program reported having been sexually abused as children. When Sutter asked the men in the program why they abused other people when they had been abused themselves, one man responded: "so I wouldn't be alone."[82] Another said: "If I had opened up back then [when the abuse happened], I probably wouldn't be in this situation." Bernard writes: "many men were abused as young boys. [Cynthia] Erickson [states]: 'that's why there's so much alcohol and drugs. That's why there's so much rape. They don't feel good. They black out, and alcohol and drugs cover the pain. That's why we're so dysfunctional. Nobody's dealing with it.'"[83] Bernard quotes Paula Ciniero, a public health nurse in interior Alaska: "people get mad at me when I say it's become tradition, but it has . . . We're talking about third-generation violence. That's tradition."[84]

2.1.5 The Role of Alaska History

In her article on the effects of domestic violence on Alaska Native women, Laura Johnson reports that they are ten times as likely to be sexually assaulted as any other Alaska

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[81] M.I. Glasser, et al., "Cycle of Child Sexual Abuse: Links Between Being a Victim and Becoming a Perpetrator," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 179, no. 6 (2001): 488: http://bjp.rcpsych.org/content/179/6/482; Sutter, "The Rapist Next Door," 2013.
[82] Sutter, "The Rapist Next Door," 2013.
[83] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 2014.
[84] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 2014.

women.[85] Causes are multi-layered and complex, and stem both from historical trauma and isolation. The arrival of colonial powers and non-Native migrants in Alaska generated myriad disruptions to Native lifeways, including trauma that has impacted multiple generations. Although each Alaska Native group has had very different and unique contact with Westerners, for the purposes of this paper I will focus on aspects of this history that may have contributed to high levels of domestic and sexual assault throughout rural Alaska. Because approximately 80 percent of the residents of remote Alaska communities are Alaska Native, I will address historical events and forces that continue to impact Alaska's indigenous communities.[86]

Upon Alaska's purchase by the United States in 1867, American missionaries entered the district and furthered United States governmental policies that aimed to assimilate Alaska Natives into American society, aligning their values and religion with those of "civilized" Americans.[87] By the 1920s, in accordance with U.S. government English-only policies, many children were being taken out of their homes and relocated in mission schools, where they were often severely punished for speaking their native language or expressing their ancestral beliefs. Accounts of the time report punishments ranging from rapped knuckles and taped mouths for speaking any language other than English, to prohibiting traditional clothing or cultural practices[88]

Non-Native migrants began entering the territory, especially with gold discoveries in Southeast Alaska and, at the turn of the twentieth century, in the Klondike and at Nome. With the arrival of large numbers of migrants, deadly epidemics of influenza, tuberculosis and small pox

[85] Johnson, "Frontier of Injustice," 2.
[86] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 333.
[87] Richard Dauenhauer. "Two Missions in Alaska," *The Pacific Historian* (1979): 85.
[88] Dauenhauer, "Two Missions in Alaska," 85; Arundale, "The Healing Constellation," 6.

swept through many Alaska Native communities. On October 20, 1918, the influenza epidemic, which had already "wrought devastation across the rest of America, and was spreading at terrifying speeds across the globe," reached Nome, Alaska via the luxury steamship the *SS Victoria.*[89] When it reached the Native population on the outskirts of Nome, it moved quickly through the Yup'ik, Inuit, and Athabaskan populations, killing as much as 60 percent of their people in some regions.[90] Most of those who died were in their prime; thus, large percentages of the men and women who would have transmitted cultural knowledge were now gone, and many children were orphaned. The trauma that resulted has had multi-generational effects; the term intergenerational trauma was coined to describe such long-lasting harms.[91] Robert Robin, et al., assert that American Indians and Alaska Natives are often affected by traumatic events on a community scale as a result of the tight knit and interwoven communities that typify most of these cultures.[92] A consequence of this interconnectivity is that pathologies associated with trauma can also extend inter-generationally, with links from trauma drawn to high rates of depression, PTSD, alienation, and alcohol abuse among Native Americans.[93]

Nevertheless, sex crime Detective John Vandervalk states unequivocally: "this is not an Alaska Native problem. It's a problem that affects all demographics."[94] Although sexual assault has been linked to intergenerational trauma in some Alaska Native peoples, for the purposes of

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[89] Amy Russell, "A Storm Like No Other: Changes That Shaped Seward Peninsula Communities at the Turn of the 20th Century," (master's thesis, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2009): 132.
[90] Harold Napoleon and Eric Christopher Madsen, *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being: With Commentary*, (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks, College of Rural Alaska, Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, 1991), 10; Russell, "A Storm Like No Other," 133.
[91] Napoleon and Madsen, "The Way of the Human Being," 10.
[92] Robert Robin et al., "Prevalence and Characteristics of Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in a Southwestern American Indian Community," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 154, no.11 (1997): 1582.
[93] Karina L. Walters, Jane M. Simoni, and Teresa Evans-Campbell, "Substance Abuse Among American Indians and Alaska Natives: Incorporating Culture in an Indigenish Stress Coping Paradigm," *Public Health Reports* 117, S1 (2002): S109.
[94] Bernard, "Rape Culture," 2014.

this paper such historically based trauma will be discussed as a potential contributor to high rates of sexual assault rather than as a direct cause. I will be examining sexual assault primarily in the context of the isolated nature of most Alaska villages. This approach is supported by the numbers; the 2016 felony level sexual assault rate per 100,000 residents was 446.4 for western Alaska, (which comprises the most widespread and isolated communities).[95] These numbers are nearly three times as high as the less isolated and more populated areas of Southeast and Northern Alaska, whose felony level sexual offenses were reported at 125.7 and 98.7 per 100,000 residents.[96]

2.1.6 Recent Downward Trends in Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence

National and state data on the incidence of sexual assault suggest promising trends. The 2014 report by the White House Council on Women and Girls states that since the implementation of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994, annual rates of domestic violence have dropped by as much as 64 percent nationwide.[97] Improvements in responses to reports of sexual assault may at least partially explain this downward trend. The VAWA provides funding for the training of specialized sexual assault response teams (SARTs). These teams of professionals – medical, legal, mental health and law enforcement – are trained to respond professionally and compassionately to victims of sexual assault, so that they are not further traumatized by authorities and medical personnel following a sexual assault.[98] In VAWA-funded specialized units, sexual assault conviction rates average 60-80 percent, a great

[95] U.S. Department of Public Safety, "Crime in Alaska Supplemental Report," 2016, 5, 7.
[96] U.S. Department of Public Safety, "Crime in Alaska Supplemental Report," 2016, 5, 7.
[97] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault*, 20.
[98] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 20.

improvement over the average in non-specialized units of approximately a 30 percent conviction rate for those accused of sexual crimes.[99] More humane treatment of sexual assault victims, as well as higher conviction rates, may encourage victims to report assaults. The National Institute of Justice has also funded 120 state and local crime labs to conduct DNA testing on backlogged sexual assault kits. From 569 kits, 32 serial offenders were identified, and five prosecutions were initiated.[100] VAWA also provides grants for rural sexual assault response and prevention teams to conduct forensic exams, collect evidence, and provide health care to victims in specifically in rural communities.[101] Finally, more states are working to comply with the federal law requiring that no sexual assault victim should have to pay for the collection and processing of his/her own sexual assault kit.

A recently released report by the UAA Justice Center suggests a significant reduction in sexual assault and domestic violence between the years of 2010 and 2015.[102] This survey asked 3,027 women in Alaska about their experiences with domestic violence and sexual assault. Responses suggest that domestic violence rates fell by 32 percent, and sexual assaults dropped by 33 percent.[103] This data suggests a promising trend. However, the Justice Center notes that limitations of this survey include that only English-speakers with phone access and with a home residence were surveyed. Many women who have been victimized do not have access to those amenities. Furthermore, the Justice Center cautions readers "this survey measured the number of

[99] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 17.
[100] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 24.
[101] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 29.
[102] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.
[103] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.

victims, not the number of victimizations."[104] Nevertheless, because the survey was conducted in the same manner in both 2010 and 2015, the drop in the reported victimization is encouraging.

A more recent 2016 study showed a 14 percent increase in the number of reported incidents of felony level sexual assault between the years 2015 and 2016.[105] The Department of Public Safety (DPS) advises caution when comparing their results with the Justice Center's Alaska Victimization Survey, explaining that the two studies used different data collection methodologies in amassing incidents of felony assaults; the DPS utilized the Federal Sex Offense database to total the number of victimizations reported to the authorities, regardless of age, which differs from the Justice Center's statewide survey that interviewed only individuals over the age of 18.[106] DPS cautions that this report may show an increase in reporting of felony level sexual offenses, rather than an increase in the crimes themselves, and that the drop in sexual offenses shown by the Alaska Victimization Survey may reflect an encouraging trend.[107] In fact, the increase in reporting may reflect greater awareness of sexual assault and domestic violence as crimes, and increased courage in reporting, rather than an increase in incidents of sexual assault and domestic violence.

In another encouraging development, Erica Martinson of the *Alaska Dispatch News* reports that in 2016 Alaska received a grant of $1.1 million for processing Alaska's sexual assault kit backlog. Since receiving this grant one serial offender has been identified via DNA evidence provided by a sexual assault kit, and has been prosecuted for crimes he committed over a decade

[104] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.
[105] U.S. Department of Public Safety, "Crime in Alaska Supplemental Report," 2016, 5.
[106] U.S. Department of Public Safety, "Crime in Alaska Supplemental Report," 2016, 5.
[107] U.S. Department of Public Safety, "Crime in Alaska Supplemental Report," 2016, 6.

ago.[108] These are important steps forward in combatting sexual assault and domestic violence at the national, rural, and local levels.

However, even with the reported decrease in sexual assaults and domestic violence crimes across the state of Alaska, the rate of sexual assault remains distressingly high. While many academic studies, as well as journalistic and government inquiries have addressed the high rates of sexual assault, few have focused on victims' and survivors experience – how they have processed the assaults, how the assaults have impacted their family and community relationships, and what they think could reduce the incidence of sexual assault and domestic violence. Owing to the lack of studies that focus on survivors' experiences and perspectives, I have chosen to take this approach in my research. This chapter is not an extant review of the literature on topics related to my research questions, though it lays the groundwork in explaining the complicated phenomena of social problems seen in many rural Alaskan communities. In future chapters I will integrate other literature as it relates to my findings.

2.2 Methodology Introduction

I began my project with the goal to fill the gap the in the literature by providing survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence a voice in this discussion. I aimed to do this through oral history interviews. By allowing them a platform to speak from, I hoped to help break the silence surrounding crimes of this nature. However, upon arriving at one of my study sites I realized that I had a unique opportunity not only to interview survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, but also to speak with professionals and elders on the topic. As such, my research

[108] Erica Martinson, "Alaska gets $1M federal grant to process backlog of sex-assault evidence kits," *Alaska Dispatch News,* October 5, 2016.

question changed during the course of my field work. I developed a series of goals and questions that I set out to answer through my field work. My primary goal has been to give survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence a voice, and a platform to speak openly about their experiences living in small communities, often near the perpetrator of the crime. My research questions are:

1)What do survivors want others to know about how this experience has affected them?

2) What are the differences and similarities between how survivors, elders, and professionals view the issues of sexual assault and domestic violence in small, remote communities?

3) How do survivors, elders and professionals compare and differ on topics concerning intervention strategies, help strategies, and the circumstances that have contributed to such high rates of both crimes in rural Alaska?

2.2.1 Methodology

To fulfill my goal of giving survivors a voice, I traveled to two remote communities in rural Alaska and spoke with people on the topic of domestic violence and sexual assault. During my time in these communities, I not only spoke with survivors, but also elders, advocates, and professionals who worked within the field of sexual assault and domestic violence. I included elders in my discussion for several reasons: first, as a sign of respect to people who have been in the area for a long period of time, and may hold knowledge that younger participants do not have; second, to better understand the historical influences on domestic violence and sexual assault in Alaska; third, to allow them the space to reflect on their lives and the changes that have taken place over the last several decades.

2.2.2 Approach: Qualitative versus Quantitative Research

I chose a qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, approach for data collection. A quantitative approach is one in which the researcher is expected to "depersonalize" her work, and view her findings objectively.[109] Quantitative studies tend to focus on observable causes and effects, and require a hypothesis, an objective study (a survey or experiment) that can be replicated by other researchers in future, and a measurable outcome.[110] Owing to the subject matter of my research, I believed a qualitative approach would be more conducive to accurately portraying the voices of participants. This approach, rather than producing a hypothesis, places the emphasis on participant perspectives and perceptions.[111] Using this approach helped me to gain an understanding of participants' experiences in a more intimate and empathetic manner.[112]

Interviews can take many forms or styles, ranging from survey questions, often requiring only a yes or no response, to open ended questions, to focus groups, in which large groups of people gather to discuss a subject. However, I wanted to listen to survivors' experiences of domestic violence and sexual assault, as well as to elders and professionals in the field. Thus, I did not believe that these standard interview styles would help me to achieve the primary goal of my project. To best achieve my goal and answer my research question, I chose oral history methodology. I hope that through the use of oral history methodology, which allowed survivors to relate their narratives, I have helped survivors regenerate a sense of agency and validation, and achieve re-externalization of traumatic events they have experienced.

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[109] Ted Palys and Chris Atchinson, *Research Design: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspective*, 4th ed. (Toronto: Nelson Education Ltd., 2008), 5.
[110] Palys and Atchinson, "Research Design," 6.
[111] Palys and Atchinson, "Research Design," 10.
[112] Palys and Atchinson, "Research Design," 19.

2.2.3 Methodology Literature Review

Oral historian Patricia Leavy defines oral history as a qualitative research method that emphasizes participants' perspectives through a series of interviews using open-ended questions.[113] Lynn Abrams, author of *Oral History Theory*, argues that its narrative format distinguishes oral history from other forms of interviewing. By speaking in narrative style, Abrams argues, participants create their own stories in a structure that may be representative of their own cultures.[114] Because remote Alaska is home to very distinctive cultures, with various heritages, I believe that this methodology gave me the opportunity to allow participants to frame their stories in ways that were both familiar and comfortable to them.

Abrams argues that in recent years, oral history has shifted from viewing the interviewer as an impartial observer to recognizing the interaction between the interviewer and narrator.[115] This type of co-ownership of an interview has two effects: first, to encourage the interviewer to examine what affect she or he may have on the outcome of the interaction, and second to encourage the empowerment of the participant through her or his collaboration in the interviewing process. Further, Abrams posits, oral history when done correctly, is meant to ask the participant not only "what happened," but also "what does it mean to you now."[116] Contemporary practitioners, oral historian Mark Klempner notes, believe that through this continuing retrospective reevaluation, individuals can place their life events into social and historical contexts, and thus begin to regenerate a sense of agency over their lives.[117] For this

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[113] Patricia Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8-10.
[114] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory,* 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 21.
[115] Abrams, *Oral History Theory,* 1st ed., 24.
[116] Abrams, *Oral History Theory,* 1st ed., 22.
[117] Mark Klempner, "Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma," *The Oral History Review* 27 no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2000): 72.

purpose, agency is defined as "the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices."[118] For many survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault this sense of agency or free will was forcibly taken from them through violent physical acts. By allowing them to reconstruct their lives in a narrative style, choosing the parts that they wish to share, I hope to have restored some sense of their agency that may have been lost.

Ideally, Mark Klempner argues, "re-externalization" of a traumatic experience occurs through such narrative oral history. Re-externalization refers to the process through which a traumatic event that was at first external to the individual became a part of that person, and then, through the telling of the event to an empathetic listener, it became external once more. This is the desired outcome of an oral history interview with a trauma survivor. Such re-externalization can occur only when participants can see the events as existing apart from themselves.[119]

Abrams argues, however, that trauma survivors' speaking out may not provide a straight path to agency. Rather, due to the complicated emotions that can surround a traumatic experience, oral history may instead offer validation and a safe place to speak. Abrams explains: "in order to speak a narrator needs a listener and a context within which s/he will be heard and crucially, believed. Most, notably, those who have been sexually abused have only recently begun to talk about their experiences after many years during which they felt shame and sometimes guilt. Many [were abused] within a structure of unequal power relations."[120] Thus, oral history can offer a space in which participants are validated and believed, and the ability to structure their narrative while understanding that they have the right to continue or discontinue the interview, can be empowering.

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[118] Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice,* 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 448.
[119] Klempner, "Navigating Life Review Interviews," 72.
[120] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 184.

Leavy further explains that one of the primary goals of oral history is to fill the historical record by "bearing witness" to participants' narratives, life stories, and unique perspectives. The act of bearing witness has the potential to not only validate the individual participant, but also to contribute to community knowledge and the understanding of current or recent events.[121] Trauma survivors, however, may have what is generally known as a "trauma response," in which they have lived through an event so shocking that it cannot be incorporated into, or understood as part of, everyday life.[122] Thus, Abrams clarifies: "bearing witness then is not about making memories manageable or even reliving individual suffering – although it may have this effect – but rather it is a compulsion to tell the truth amidst uncertainty: a need to validate experiences which only exist in flashbacks, dreams, and amnesia."[123] Thus while oral history may not provide a sense of agency or empowerment, it may instead help the individual place the experience within the realm of reality through the presence of an empathetic listener.

Although some critics argue that speaking about traumatic events may overwhelm a survivor and do more harm than good, contemporary literature argues otherwise. It has been found instead that oral history, when done with empathy, respect, and transparency, can allow survivors to regenerate agency over their life stories, and can be (though is not always) the first step on the road to recovery.[124]

Sean Field, in his article "Beyond 'Healing': Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration," acknowledges some criticisms of oral history that have surfaced in the past. He discusses the South Africa Truth Commission, an oral history project that attempted to unite South Africa in

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[121] Leavy, *Understanding Qualitative Research,* 17.
[122] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 2nd ed., 178.
[123] Abrams, *Oral History Theory,* 2nd ed., 179.
[124] Abrams, *Oral History Theory,* 2nd ed., 179.

the wake newly abolished apartheid.[125] The South Africa Truth Commission made such statements that it could grant people who participated "healing," "regeneration," and "closure," and that after the Commission was completed South Africa would be reunited.[126] However, resolution of such deep historical traumas exceeds what oral history is capable of offering, and thus such promises violated the principles set out by the Oral History Association (OHA). In the wake of participants' testimonies, some individuals reported feeling a sense of closure, while others said they felt their stories had been exploited for political aims.[127] This dissatisfaction likely resulted from the Truth Commission's failure to follow the OHA guidelines and to maintain transparency concerning achievable outcomes for participants.

It is now common practice in oral history not to speak of being able to provide "closure," but instead to speak of providing a framework through which participants may be able to regenerate some sense of agency over their lives and their stories.[128] OHA standards require that all oral historians demonstrate strong moral behavior, the basic tenet of which is transparency.[129] This means transparency both before the interviews occur – using both a verbal explanation and a written consent form – and in continued communication after the interviews are completed. If these protocols are carefully observed, and the narrator has been fully informed of his/her rights, then the oral historian is using the best moral practices.[130] In my own research, I have done my best to comply with all standards set forth not only by the OHA, but also by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Institutional Review Board.

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[125] Sean Field, "Beyond 'Healing': Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration," *Oral History* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2006):31.
[126] Field, "Beyond 'Healing," 31-33.
[127] Field, "Beyond 'Healing,'" 33.
[128] Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 2nd ed., 123; Field, "Beyond 'Healing,'" 34.
[129] "Principles and Best Practices" Oral History Association, 2016, https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/05/.
[130] "Principles and Best Practices," Oral History Association, 2016.

2.2.4 Research Process

I applied for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) during the spring of 2016. I underwent a rigorous process involving a full explanation of my project, and a detailed description of how I would offset any potential harm that could come to participants either emotionally, due to talking about a sensitive and deeply personal subject, or via community retaliation. I complied both with the standards set forth by the IRB, and with the ethical requirements outlined by the Oral History Association. On April 5, 2016 the IRB ruled that because I was using Oral History Methodology I was exempt from IRB review, and my research was approved. I nevertheless followed IRB protocols, as well as the requirements of the Oral History Association. Both institutions required me to be clear and transparent concerning the goals of my project with all participants both before and after an interview took place, and to do "everything in my power" to protect the identity of survivors who chose to participate in my research.[131] To help ensure survivors' anonymity, I followed the IRB protocol in ensuring that the recorded interviews have been stored on my password-protected computer and kept in my locked office when not in use. The electronic copies of the transcripts have been stored on a hard drive in a locked box, maintained in a locked office in the Arctic and Northern Studies office. All hard copies of interview transcripts have been securely stored alongside the electronic copies. When the project is complete, I will continue to follow IRB protocol and shred all hard copies of transcripts. After my thesis is complete, the voice recordings and the electronic copies of the transcripts will be stored in a locked box inside of a locked cabinet in the Arctic and Northern

[131] "Principles and Best Practices," Oral History Association, 2016.

Studies office on the 6th Floor of the Gruening building. All audio recordings will be destroyed three years after the thesis completion date.

2.2.4.1 Community and Narrator Selection

The first community I visited was a small village in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region. I knew several individuals and families who were living in the area, and a survivor of sexual assault asked me travel there to speak to survivors and elders. My father travelled with me to help maintain my safety during the trip, and we arrived in the spring of 2016. I spent six days in that location conducting interviews. I will not disclose the location of the village, to maintain the anonymity of the participants. We stayed with family friends approximately a half hour's boat ride from the nearest community. In the morning, my dad and I would drive to the community by boat. My father would then go for long walks, while I conducted interviews in the privacy of the participants' homes. In the evening my father and I would boat back to our family friends' home.

I also worked out of a women's shelter located in rural Alaska in the fall of 2016. I had contacted the shelter director approximately one year previously to inform her of my project, answer questions, and establish a rapport. After several months, I was approved to visit the shelter, contingent upon a background check. The director clarified via email correspondence that I could spend time in the shelter at my discretion, and gave me free rein to speak to whomever I wished, with the unspoken agreement that I was to be careful not to make anyone uncomfortable. Further, because many women in the shelter were fleeing potentially violent situations, anonymity was of the utmost importance; she therefore briefed me on the shelter's policies and procedures.

Owing to monetary and time constraints I stayed in the village for just six days. When I arrived in the shelter I was re-briefed concerning the standards of anonymity that were expected during my stay in the community. I was then allowed to attend shelter meetings and take notes, and was granted access to unused rooms to conduct interviews. During my time in the shelter I tried to be transparent with every person with whom I spoke about my purpose in being there. In my interactions with women residents of the shelter I explained my purpose, and if they seemed interested, I invited them to participate. I clarified that participants would remain anonymous, and that I would remove any identifying characteristics from their stories, to the best of my ability, if they chose to take part. I then encouraged them to think about whether they were interested, at least overnight. I chose to explain my project up front, allowing individuals time to consider if participating was in their best interest, to avoid placing undue pressure on survivors, and to allow them to participate on their own terms. Those who were interested approached me later to ask follow-up questions, or to schedule an interview. In the interest of anonymity, I approached each person individually, rather than publicizing the project broadly.

I approached the first few professionals and elders I interviewed directly, explained my purpose, and asked if they would be interested in participating. After that, the recruitment took place via the snowball method, in which participants either recommended that someone else contact me, or that I contact another individual. It was through the snowball method that I interviewed both an Alaska State Trooper and an Assistant District Attorney. Interviews with all participants were semi-structured and open-ended. They lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours at an agreed upon location, though generally they took place in a private home, at the women's shelter, or in a professional's office.

2.2.4.2 Interviewing Methodology

The format and content of the interviews I conducted were flexible, and specific to the individual. Open-ended statements guided conversations with survivors. Topics included: Childhood experiences; family relationships; beliefs, values, and attitudes; incidents of assault; living in isolated communities and near a perpetrator; helpful resources; needed resources; family responses; community responses; outside help; etc. I began by asking survivor participants to tell me about themselves. The release form I requested they sign before participating guaranteed their anonymity to the best of my ability, and that a recording of their voice would never be heard by anyone but myself. I then requested their permission to use pieces of their testimony in a thesis, newspaper article, radio interview, or governmental publication, provided that I would read their testimony using my own voice. Each participant had the option not to approve any of these uses.

Interviews with elders were more specific to the individual. Topics covered included life history; reflections on causes and effects of sexual assault and domestic violence; prevalence of sexual assault and domestic violence; needed interventions; interventions that had proven helpful, etc. I would begin interviews by asking participants to tell me about themselves, and most follow-up questions would unfold from their reflections. The release form they were asked to sign was very similar to that of survivors, with the exception that they had the opportunity to ask to be identified if they wished.

The format of interviews with professionals differed slightly, though they were still open-ended, and dependent on the observations made by the individual. These interviews generally focused less on their life stories, and more on what their employment entailed; how long they had been working in the field; what resources they thought were helpful for victims; what

resources they thought were not helpful to victims; what they thought was still needed, etc. Interviews with professionals were tailored to their jobs, and generally the content unfolded from our observations. The release I asked them to sign requested their permission to use their names and job positions in a thesis, newspaper article, radio interview, or governmental publication. If any of the participants were uncomfortable with a part of the release form as it was written, they had the option to amend the form and initial next to the revision.

I interviewed a total of fourteen individuals. Some of these were elders, some survivors, some advocates, and some were all three. I have chosen not to delineate where the overlap occurs to protect the identity of all participants involved. All told, I interviewed six survivors, of whom five were female and one male; eight advocates; five elders; one Alaska State Trooper; and one Assistant District Attorney. In interviews where there was overlap, I began the interview by asking a general life history question, and chose my follow-up questions based on what the participant seemed the most comfortable discussing. Generally, however, if the participant was a survivor and fit into another category, he or she preferred to relate his/her experiences with sexual assault or domestic violence. I have chosen not to disclose the names of the professionals and elders I interviewed or the demographics of any individuals interviewed, to preserve their privacy and to prevent identification of the communities in which I did my field work. Similarly, I have omitted defining characteristics of home communities and family life, to protect participants' privacy.

2.2.4.3 Recording Equipment

I used a Zoom H4N Digital Multitrack Audio Recording Device for the interviews; I chose not to video record conversations, to further protect participants' identities. At each step along

the way the participant was in full control of the interview. For example, I asked each participant before the interview if he/she would prefer an audio recording or paper notes. All participants agreed to audio recording. I explained to them both before the interview, and in the full disclosure consent form that I required them to sign before we began, that should they become uncomfortable, they had the full right to end the interviews or move on to a different subject. I explained to each participant that if she/he did not wish the interview to be used in publication, his/her wishes would be respected. I also explained to all interviewees that I was closely following IRB protocol concerning safe keeping of audio files and the transcriptions of our interviews. They were aware that portions of their interviews would be used in publications. Because of the possibility that a participant could be further victimized via retaliation or retribution if it were known by the assailant or community that she/he had spoken out, I took all possible measures to insure anonymity.

This project is not meant to point fingers or bring perpetrators to justice, but only to provide survivors a safe way to tell their stories. At the end of the interview, I provided participants with a list of psychologists, therapists, and other counseling tools that may be useful to them. I encouraged participants to seek counseling if they indicated they wanted it, and helped them to identify the most appropriate help-line for them to contact.

2.2.5 Transcribing Methodology

The recorded interviews have never been out of my control, and all transcription has been done by myself alone. I assigned each participant a number code, so names are not associated with transcriptions. If the participant requested a transcript, I sent a transcript of the interview using the method of her/his choice (either electronically or via US Postal Service). I removed

anything participants did not wish to have disclosed and made requested corrections, to the best of my ability. All interviews took place in the calendar year of 2016, however to further protect participants' identities I have chosen not to divulge the exact date or location that the interview took place. I assigned each professional respondent a pseudonym for organizational and continuity purposes. In addition, I acquired permission from professionals to disclose the generalities of their professional position to contextualize their testimonies. I have chosen not to assign pseudonyms to survivors to ensure to the best of my ability that their anonymity is maintained, and lessen the chances that one quotation cannot be tracked to another by the same individual.

I transcribed the interviews using Express Scribe, a manual transcription software that allows a "secure" option. This allowed me to password protect all interviews and transcription files to ensure safe keeping of all potentially identifying information. Although there are some auto-transcribing options available, they are easily misled by variances in dialect, incorrect grammar, or the presence of more than one voice in the recording.[132] Because I wanted to relate all participants' words as closely as possible to how they were stated, I chose not to use auto-transcription.

After transcribing my recordings, I identified themes that arose in the transcriptions and then I analyzed common themes in the testimonies of survivors, and compared them with ideas expressed by professionals and/or advocates in the field of domestic violence and sexual assault. Following the Principles and Best Practices set forth by the OHA, I have done everything in my power to avoid stereotypes, misrepresentations, or manipulations of the participants' words. I

[132] Jack Shofield, "Can Speech-recognition Software Transcribe Interviews?" *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/askjack/2008/feb/21/canspeechrecognitionsoftware.

have endeavored to retain the integrity of the all participants' perspectives, and although I have at times paraphrased group ideas expressed, I have striven to present the intention of their words as they were presented to me.

Chapter 3 Survivors' Perspectives

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the voices of the survivors with whom I spoke in the course of my research as they share their perspectives. By the end of my field work, I interviewed five female survivors, and one male survivor of childhood sexual assault. Although statistically more women than men report incidences of childhood sexual assault, this may reflect the greater social stigma that surrounds male survivors. Consequently, I am honored that a male survivor of sexual assault trusted me enough to share his journey through life following his abuse.

Many of the stories that survivors shared with me are graphic and personal in nature. I hesitated to relay some of their stories, but having spoken with the survivors, I have come to believe that the following presents survivor's experiences, as they wished them to be told. Out of respect both for their stories and their journey through life, I am sharing them. I have done everything in my power to protect the identity of my respondents, and to remove any identifying information about them and their families. Furthermore, I have sought to relay the meaning of their words to the best of my ability.

3.2 Research Findings

Many themes arose as I analyzed these interviews. I have selected only a few for the survivors' chapter. The most prominent theme that I discovered in the course of my research is the interrelated and overlapping nature of many social problems and conditions within rural Alaskan communities. One issue cannot be addressed without encountering another, equally important issue. All respondents with whom I spoke, survivors and professionals alike, highlighted the interconnectedness of contributing variables including: sexual assault, domestic

violence, alcohol abuse, multigenerational trauma, lack of funding for services, isolation, and normalization of sexual assault and domestic violence (Fig 1).

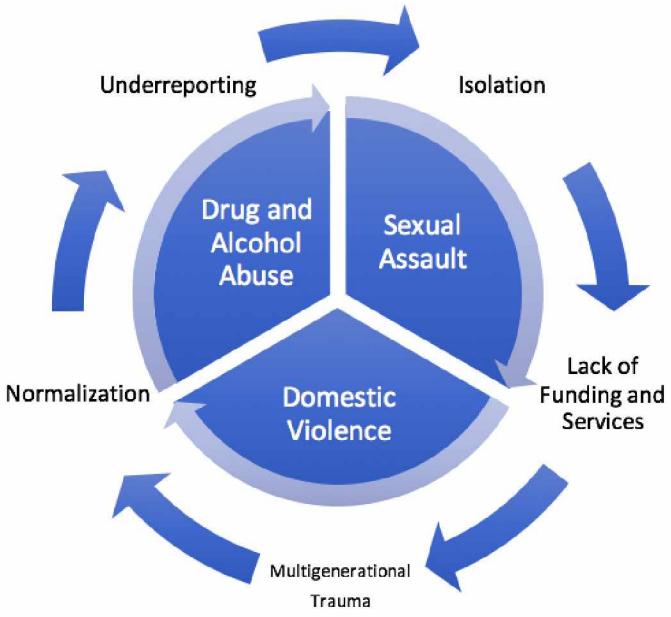

Figure 1: Interconnectness

However, while the themes identified above will be discussed in full in subsequent chapters, survivors spoke only of the aspects with which they had experience. Thus, survivors spoke in particular of their experiences with sexual or domestic violence; the presence of alcohol or drug abuse within their communities; the normalization of violence; the isolation that they experienced following incidences of abuse; and multigenerational trauma. I will explore each of these issues in this chapter.

3.2.1 Substance Abuse

One of the most prominent themes in the interviews with survivors was the pervasive presence of drugs and alcohol in their lives, relationships, and communities. The ways that drugs

and alcohol manifested themselves took various forms in survivors' stories. While some survivors personally abused alcohol, others faced partners who because abusive while inebriated. However, in every account related to me during this project, drug and alcohol abuse surfaced following the abuse, was used as a coping mechanism, or contributed to the abuse suffered. One survivor related her partner's descent into alcoholism, and the violence she believed resulted from his addiction:

> I met my [children's] dad. And I didn't know he was an alcoholic. We were together for like, maybe a year. And he'd only like drink beer every now and then. And then, after we got married, maybe a year and a half two years later, every now and then he started drinking hard liquor. And then of course I drank with him . . . When he started drinking hard alcohol he used to black out, and, the blackouts were physical, and he'd apologize and whatnot, that he won't do it again. I saw, the, the good, you know?

She related that while her husband would black out, he would often abuse her both verbally and physically. This abuse became more frequent and violent as their marriage progressed. They were living in a larger community at the time that had a police presence, and by the time they had been together for three years she kept the police on speed dial in case of emergency, and a bag of her children's clothes accessible in case they should need to escape. The violence came to a peak when her husband broke her arm with a cast iron pan and continued to beat her up and down her torso and legs, leaving behind bruises and scars that never faded.

Another survivor related that the abuse she suffered at the hands of her inebriated husband has not only led to her hospitalization, but traumatized her children as well.

> [My husband] drinks a lot. And . . . he doesn't know how to control it. He becomes really violent and angry. He uses it. Not in a good way. And, there was a couple times where he . . . uhm . . . beat me up, and, he was hitting me on my face. The first time he did I got medevacked [out of the village]. My nose wasn't in place, and, I had a lot of hair missing. My toes

> were partially frozen. In January he took off my shoes, socks, my coat, hat, everything, and he told me he was gonna leave me there to freeze. And it was dark out. Like four in the morning. No matter how much I was yelling nobody came. We were alone . . . And then he learned to, not hit me on my face anymore [to avoid leaving visible evidence of the abuse] . . . When my [child] sees a bottle of alcohol he'll start shaking. Because of how it effects their dad.

In Alaska, January is one of the coldest and darkest months of the year, with temperatures that frequently reach 30 to 40 degrees below zero Fahrenheit; this woman's story illustrates the compounding effects of severe weather and isolation on domestic and sexual violence in Alaska. After a time, her husband returned to where he had left her, and moved her to her grandfather's house, where she was handed shoes and told to "run" to escape from her husband. Her grandfather, who was once an abusive alcoholic himself, ceased to drink late in life, and shortly thereafter stopped abusing his wife. While causation is difficult to pinpoint, much published research, as well as my original research, concludes that the pervasiveness of alcohol abuse contributes to the high rates of both sexual and domestic violence in rural Alaskan communities. To keep the peace and save her marriage, this woman began to drink with her husband.

> I, wasn't really into alcohol . . . And, I always wanted to be happy together, just him, me and our kids. But, no matter what I did it didn't work. Like I thought if I became sober, he would follow me, too. And I – it was a year. That was when I broke down and started drinking too.

Furthermore, she was surrounded by alcohol within her community, as all her friends and most of her family members abused it. She said that before long:

> It felt like it was just a normal thing . . . Just wanting to drink, and, I used to try to find baby sitters, so I could go out and drink. But then I'd be gone for so long . . . Somehow we'd . . . find alcohol. And, it just felt normal like a normal living thing."

Canadian researchers Moffitt and Fikowski found through the focus groups they led over the course of six years in two remote northern communities in the Northwest Territories that

alcohol use was considered "normal and accepted" within these remote northern communities, as well, and that as children watched their parents abuse alcohol, they integrated it into their ways of knowing.[1] The previously quoted survivor related that she finally decided to stop drinking when her oldest child came to her:

> Tears were coming out of his eyes, and he said 'mom! I keep praying - I keep praying for you to stop drinking but you don't!' And then. After that I just, fell. And I held him and I cried with him. And I didn't want him to lose hope, so I, ever since, I never touched it again.

The fear that this survivor expressed that her child would "lose hope," is a valid one. In their seminal work on the long-term effects of adverse childhood experiences, now commonly referred to as ACEs, Felitti, et al., found that living with an individual who abused either alcohol or illicit drugs was one of the most common adverse childhood experiences that could contribute to mortality in adults.[2] Furthermore, children who were exposed to one category of childhood abuse or household dysfunction had a 65 to 93 percent increased probability of experiencing additional adverse childhood experiences.[3] The Adverse Childhood Experiences study further noted that as the number of adverse experiences for children increased, the likelihood increased that individuals also experienced "anxiety, anger and depression," as well as turning to smoking, alcohol or drugs as coping mechanisms.[4] Moreover, in their publication "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse and Dependence Data From a National Sample," Dean Kilpatrick, et al., stress the long-term negative impacts of adverse childhood events on individuals.[5] They

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[1] Pertice Moffitt and Heather Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence: Two Community Narratives," *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Community Research Alliance (*2016): 6.
[2] Vincent J. Felitti et al., "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and the Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study*," American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 14, no. 4 (1998): 248.
[3] Felitti et al., "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and the Household Dysfunction," 249.
[4] Felitti et al., "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and the Household Dysfunction," 253.
[5] Dean G. Kilpatrick et al., "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse and Dependence: Data from a National

interviewed 4,023 adolescents aged twelve to seventeen to identify risk factors for substance abuse in adolescents, and found that witnessing violence was "among the most powerful risk factors for substance use disorders," tripling the risk of substance abuse and dependence.[6] These findings correlated with my own, as not a single survivor mentioned the use of alcohol without also referencing sexual or domestic violence within the home.

The individuals whom I interviewed frequently mentioned not only their partners' descent into alcohol abuse, but the incidents of violence that followed, and their children's exposure to both the alcohol abuse and violence. Some survivors said that they had not realized how their violent relationship or their spouse's substance abuse affected their children until much later. One woman said:

> I didn't know my children . . . were being affected by watching me being abused, and I didn't know it was affecting their school work . . . My oldest daughter she told me she used to worry about me, just in case I get killed [while her husband was drinking].

One survivor explained that she did not decide to leave her husband until her oldest child asked her to. She said that she had not realized how frightened her children were for her wellbeing.

> For sixteen years I let him [my husband] abuse me . . . until my oldest [child] told me that they're tired of seeing me being beaten up ever since [they were] small. First [my husband] was really good. Until that alcohol start getting into him. And then he would start talking about women. Other women. And then after he would be gone all night when he comes back he'd start beating me up. And I just let him do it. I never pay back, or, hit him back, or talk back to him, I try to listen to my grandma's advice . . . He even point guns at me, or, throw bottles at me, and, burn me with a cigarette, all that stuff . . . For sixteen years I let him abuse me until my grandma, she see me after my head got cracked from him and there was blood clot, and then my, grandma told me that I need to leave him, my

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Sample," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 68, no. 1 (2000): 12.

[6] Kilpatrick et al., "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse," 2, 11-12.

husband cuz I might end up dying before she did. But, she died ahead of me.

This survivor described the adverse childhood experiences that her children endured, including not only the violent physical abuse of their mother, but also the near-constant inebriation of their father. This woman is an elder, who grew up during a time when leaving one's husband was particularly uncommon. Thus, for many years, others strongly encouraged and expected her to remain with her husband despite his violent tendencies. The culture of non-interference that prevails in many small villages may have influenced people to refrain from criticizing another couple's relationship for fear of causing a rift within the community. Jimm G. Good Tracks in his article "Native American Non-interference," explains that within the culture of non-interference, any meddling in another person's actions or business is not tolerated "even when it is to keep the other person from doing something foolish or dangerous."[7] Thus, the fact that this survivor's grandmother and child approached her, urging her to leave her husband, illustrates the extent of abuse that she suffered at his hands by the time they intervened.

A study on alcohol abuse and related violence in Russia may offer some insight into the relationship between alcohol abuse and violence in rural Alaska. A study completed by William Alex Pridemore entitled "Weekend Effects on Binge Drinking and Homicide: The Social Connection between Alcohol and Violence in Russia," found that the high tolerance for heavy drinking in Russian society may increase the risk of violent outcomes.[8] Although Russian society differs in many ways from Alaskan cultures and conditions in rural Alaska, I believe that some similarities exist. The most prominent of these is that many rural Alaskan communities do not

[7] Jimm G. Good Tracks, "Native American Non-interference," *Social Work* 18, no. 6 (1973): 30.
[8] William Alex Pridemore, "Weekend Effects on Binge Drinking and Homicide: The Social Connection between Alcohol and Violence in Russia," *Addiction* 99, no. 8 (2004): 1035.

have bars or pubs, which is also true in some areas of northern Russia.[9] As a result, Pridemore explains, alcohol consumption often takes place in private or semi-private locations, without formal and informal controls such as a bar bouncer or unrelated onlookers. The absence of these cultural and structural forces that may otherwise help check violence, could provide an opening for deeper levels of intoxication, and possibly more lethal violence.[10]

Many rural Alaskan communities have adopted a "dry" Local Option policy, meaning that they officially ban alcoholic beverages within the community.[11] However, one survivor who lives in such a "dry" community related that many of her community members frequently bootleg alcohol into her hometown, and as a result of its easy accessibility, even her youngest sibling has begun to drink. She told me:

> My baby sister, she's twelve [or] thirteen. She gets drunk [sighs] . . . She gets ahold of my [older siblings'] alcohol. It's everywhere in the family … It's [alcohol] just everywhere. Ever since [a] liquor store opened [in a nearby town]. It's an everyday thing now. People buy it for a hundred dollars. It's how they make their money . . . Selling, bootlegging . . . In the village . . . my kids were surrounded by men like my dad. My kid's dad. My [relative's boyfriend]. Those people that try to make money off selling booze and weed. Thinking they're cool and everything. It's what they're surrounded by. That's how they're gonna grow up.

In an attempt to show her children a different way of life, she left her home community, in the hopes that the culture of binge drinking would not exist where they moved.

Other substance abuse threatens rural residents, however. Another survivor related that when alcohol is not readily available, some community members turn to more dangerous alternatives:

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[9] Pridemore, "Weekend Effects on Binge Drinking," 1035.
[10] Pridemore, "Weekend Effects on Binge Drinking," 1035.
[11] Matthew Berman and Teresa Hull, "Community Control of Alcohol in Alaska," *University of Alaska, Anchorage,* XXXI, no. 1 (1997): 1.

> My [younger relatives] started huffing gas, too. [They] came in with mud in [their] mouth. I dunno why maybe because [they] didn't want us to smell it.

Substance abuse seems to reach into every aspect of life in rural Alaska, so much so that many respondents would state casually or briefly "there's alcohol everywhere," or "[the abuse] happens more often when he's drinking," or when their partners were "needing to drink." The stories told to me included not only their own experiences with violence and alcohol, but also the stories of friends, relatives, and community members. This abuse has at times led to the neglect not only of one another, but also of young children. One survivor stated:

> My really close [relative's] baby died, he was seven months old, they were drinking. I was there drinking, too. We all woke up and that baby was dead. Just laying there. Cold. And we were kinda still going from drinking, kinda hung over.

Shockingly, this was the second story that was related to me that involved alcohol and the death of a very young child. I believe that examples such as these reflect the neglect, physical and sexual abuse, or exposure to abuse that affect many children in remote Alaskan communities. Child neglect and abuse often correlates with alcohol abuse.

In "The Historical Roots of a Frontier Alcohol Culture: Alaska and Northern Canada," Mary Ehrlander relates that alcohol consumption in Northern Canada and Alaska often involved binge or spree drinking.[12] Bernard Segal and Casear Korolenko, in their study "Addictive Disorder in Arctic Climates: Theory Research and Practice at the Novosibirsk Institute," found that individuals who lived in Northern Siberia also were more likely to misuse alcohol than other Russian citizens, as a result, they posit, of the severe climate in that region.[13] The historical

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[12] Mary Ehrlander, "The Historical Roots of a Frontier Alcohol Culture: Alaska and Northern Canada," *The Northern Review 32* (Spring 2010): 86.
[13] Bernard Segal and Caesar Korolenko, "Addictive Disorder in Arctic Climates: Theory Research and Practice at the Novosibirsk Institute" in *Addictive Disorders in Arctic Climate* (London: Haworth Press New York, 1990): 13.

development of binge drinking styles in these northern regions, in addition to the lifelong impacts of adverse childhood experiences, may combine to result in higher than average rates of alcohol abuse in remote Alaskan communities. Indeed, Alaska's alcohol-related mortality rate is the highest per capita in the United States.[14]

The relationship between alcohol and violence is complex, however. One survivor of child sexual assault with whom I spoke said that alcohol is not the root of the issue. While he struggled with alcohol abuse for many years, he felt that he used it as a coping mechanism to avoid his history of abuse.

> [When I was six years old] I was sexually abused by a young man. And . . . into a big part of my adult life [the abuse] has affected [my] relationships, with women. [And] . . . alcohol was really involved in my life then too . . . You know, I didn't like how I felt when I woke up in the morning. I knew how I could change it really quick. I'd just start drinking . . . [But] what I find too is that so many people wanna just blame it on alcohol. And what I try to tell people is 'don't give it that much power,' because it is only a symptom of so many underlying issues that we haven't . . . even touched the tip of. But alcohol has been a good medicine, because it's worked to numb everything out, and make things look different, or maybe put that mask on so that I don't have to look at all the ugly things that have happened.

In spite his strong belief that alcohol is not the root of the problem, this survivor agreed that alcohol and domestic violence often go hand-in-hand. He stated that alcohol can unlock many pent-up emotions from past experiences, and that they can be funneled into violent and unhealthy reactions.

> I think the thing with alcohol and domestic violence is that . . . alcohol probably makes it more lethal . . . But the scariest part is when it happens when there's no alcohol involved . . . because then the person is clear-

[14] State of Alaska Department of Department of Health and Social Services: Division of Public Health, "Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics" under "Intentional Self-Harm (Suicide) Deaths," *Health Analytics and Vital Records Section (*Juneau, Alaska, 2016), 33: http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/VitalStatistics_AnnualReport_2016.pdf.

> minded. They're thinking. With alcohol you're gonna be all clouded up, but to me the scariest part is whenever somebody does that when they're cold sober.

In accordance with this, another survivor related that she did not decide to leave her abusive husband until he threatened her while sober.

> I used to say 'oh he only does this when he's drinking. He's only like this when he's drinking.' But . . . then [one day] we started arguing about something. I don't - I can't even remember what we were arguing about . . . [but then] he . . . took the thermos bottle and he put it, there [presses her hand up against her throat], and he goes… 'if you don't stop I know how to make you stop.' And I was like, thinking, 'he's sober. Why is he...?' And then *right* there . . . Right there I - I told myself that we're gonna leave. Right there. And then. I think it was almost three weeks later we left.

Throughout the interviews I conducted, alcohol consumption tended to excuse the violent behavior of inebriated males. Female victims of domestic violence often spoke of how their husbands' inebriation during violent incidents led them to believe that drinking caused the violence. While a threat of violence while her husband was sober marked the turning point for the survivor quoted above, alcohol-fueled violence caused most of the women to leave. The role of alcohol in violence appears to be quite complex. Canadian researchers Moffitt and Fikowski found that participants in their study described alcohol as a "reason to be violent;" that is, it gave perpetrators an excuse for their actions.[15] Compounding the direct mental, emotional and physical injuries this abuse inflicts, the violence often silences and isolates the victims of these crimes.

[15] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 6.

3.2.2 Isolation

An additional theme that many survivors discussed was the isolating nature of both sexual assault and domestic violence. However, the two crimes appear to isolate the victims in different ways. While the effects of domestic violence are visibly noticeable, often resulting in black eyes and bruises, sexual assault is often more emotionally isolating as a result of the deep shame survivors incur. The remote, inaccessible locations of rural Alaska communities can isolate survivors further.

3.2.2.1 Sexual Assault

Male survivors of sexual assault tend to experience an additional layer of isolation; while most sexual assault survivors feel shame, anger, and grief, this male survivor discussed the ways in which his sex shaped his perception of the event:

> [The sexual assault caused] so much . . . shame, anger. I tell people now you know, at that time I didn't tell anybody, I didn't tell my mother, I didn't even tell my dog . . . And so, I was dealing with . . . the grief, and sorrow . . . It was like there was this thing in me that had to prove there was nothing wrong with me because all the time I thought there was. 'This shouldn'ta happened to me . . . I must have asked for it'. . . Then there's another stereotype of you know that 'men don't cry' . . . But it's hard to get past some of the stereotype because the shame is put in there too, that, and if something happens to, a young man, it's like, it's kind of a double thing because, it's not supposed to happen to men, and if it did happen it must be your fault, and then other men look down and say 'yeah, look at you, there's something wrong with *you*' . . . It's a shame - shame based.

This male survivor described the ways in which he felt marginalized as a result of his sexual assault, and the barriers he faced in reaching out or reporting. Sexual assault is a disempowering experience for any survivor; but males can also experience the assault as emasculating, leading survivors to question their sexual orientation, and their actions leading up to the assault. Michelle

Davies' article "Male sexual assault victims: a selective review of the literature and implications for support services" argues that male victims are assaulted twice; first during the actual assault, and secondarily in the reactions of the public, who frequently believe male rape myths such as ''men cannot be raped'' or ''sexual assault is not as severe for a man as it is for a woman."[16] These myths, Davies argues, minimize the impact of sexual assault on male victims and blame the victim. Furthermore, they may inhibit a male survivor of sexual assault from reaching out, for fear of stigmatization. This ignorance and stigma, Davies argues, seeps even into rape crisis centers, with one rape crisis center employee stating, ''Most males that are fondled or sodomized are males that want to be sodomized.''[17] Furthermore, Davies states, such ignorance surrounding the sexual assault of male victims prevents their needs being met.[18]

These are important points to reflect upon, especially considering that many perpetrators of childhood sexual assault are not attracted specifically to either girls or boys, but may instead be attracted to children.[19] The child molestation rate in the state of Alaska is six times the national average, and while more women than men report incidences of childhood sexual assault, this may reflect the social stigma that surrounds male survivors.[20]

Survivors of sexual assault, regardless of their sex or gender, however, experience feelings of isolation, fear and guilt. One survivor of sexual assault I interviewed related:

> Long time ago, when my dad died, I got sexually abused. And that. That killed my inside . . . I just wanted to die. Like I wasn't a little girl anymore . . . I told my grandma that I felt so dirty . . . Even I was crying for help, and, yelling, they didn't come and help me, they just laugh at me. And I

[16] Michelle Davies, "Male Sexual Assault Victims: A Selective Review of the Literature and Implications for Support Services," *Aggressive and Violent Behavior,* 7 (2000): 204.
[17] Davies, "Male Sexual Assault Victims," 205.
[18] Davies, "Male Sexual Assault Victims," 205.
[19] "Pedophelia," *Psychology Today*, April 14, 2017, https://www.psychologytoday.com/conditions/pedophilia.
[20] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.

> start blaming myself maybe it was my fault that, that guy raped me. So I went to my mom to tell her what happened to me and she didn't do nothing. So I went to go to my grandma - my grandma listened to me . . . I told her I felt so dirty and ugly inside that I want to wash and throw away my clothes, and she let me do that, she brought me to a sauna, to a steam house to wash up, so nobody can watch me . . . My grandma was very understanding person . . . I don't know how many times I got raped . . . I-I even felt like it was my fault.

Having no one except her grandmother to lean on, this survivor experienced guilt, shame, and extreme isolation. Survivors of sexual assault often encounter this experience. Candice Feiring, Lynn Taska, and Michael Lewis's article entitled "Adjustment Following Sexual Abuse Discovery: The Role of Shame and Attributional Style," relates how victims of childhood sexual assault often experience the feeling of intense shame.[21] The authors define shame as a state in which the whole self feels defective as a result of a perceived failure to meet self-imposed standards.[22] They explain that the more severe the abuse inflicted on the child, the greater the feelings of shame associated with it.[23] The survivor quoted above, who was repeatedly penetrated against her will by much older men, must have experienced nearly overwhelming feelings of guilt and shame surrounding the events of her childhood. As she told me of the experience she wept, reluctant to talk about the events, but needing to relate the experience. She told me, "talking about it helps."

This survivor explained that she lived with her mother until her stepfather raped and impregnated her sister. After her sister's impregnation, "my mom didn't even do nothin'. And I tell her 'mom, if I was you I would leave him. Not stick around with him.' My mom never understand what I was trying to tell her how I felt." She said that she might have stayed with her

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[21] Candice Feiring, Lynn Taska, and Michael Lewis, "Adjustment Following Sexual Abuse Discovery: The Role of Shame and Attributional Style," *Developmental Psychology,* 38, no. 1 (2002): 79.
[22] Feiring, Taska, and Lewis, "Adjustment Following Sexual Abuse," 79.
[23] Feiring, Taska, and Lewis, "Adjustment Following Sexual Abuse," 79.

mother even then, but the same community members who had raped her began to mock her, laughing and claiming that she would have her stepfather's baby. When she would tell them to go away, they would "take advantage of [her] and show [her] money." This survivor is now an elder, and although she does not remember her age at the time these events occurred, she believes it was sometime in the 1950s and 1960s. The isolation of these communities during that era exceeded today's conditions. Extremely limited law enforcement and other social services compounded the mental and emotional isolation engendered by the crime itself.

Another, younger, survivor related her experience living through repeated sexual assaults perpetrated by her older brother that were equally isolating in nature.

> I envy my sisters . . . because they . . . remember about when we were growing up, all the good and happy stuff of going logging, camping. And I envy them for all their memories cuz I can't remember. I remember little things, but most part what I remember is in the middle of the night, like a hand trying to – All those bad parts . . . Even in the summer time I remember sleeping in sleeping bag and zipping it all the way up . . . I think, it led up to the, actual – sexual – when I was fifteen or sixteen. And then I tried overdosing. Everybody was at school, my parents were at work, and I was at home alone, and I took a whole bottle of Tylenol pills. And then, only like, how many minutes later I'm like 'what am I doing?' So I called a health aide and she came, she gave me ipecac, and I threw it all up.

Owing to the shame engendered by these crimes, many survivors of sexual assault fall into suicidal ideations.[24] Few statistics for incest rates are available due to the fact that incidences of incest are less reported, and thus less understood than the rates for sexual assault that is not interfamilial.[25] Margaret Ballantine and Lynne Soine, in their article "Sibling Sexual Abuse — Uncovering the Secret," argue that because sibling incest is often dismissed as "child's play,"

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[24] Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, "Effects of Sexual Violence," under "About Sexual Assault," https://rainn.org/.
[25] Network of Victim Assistance, "Incest" under "Crime Info," http://www.novabucks.org/otherinformation/incest/.

and owing to the shame surrounding the incidents, victims report less often.[26] The silence surrounding these crimes, Shanti Shapiro argues in the article "Self-mutilation and Self Blame in Incest Victims," leads to a "high prevalence of self-mutilation and of thoughts about suicide" in victims.[27]

The survivor I interviewed could not admit to, report, or seek help for the crimes perpetrated against her, partly, she explained, because of the small, close knit nature of the community she lived in; if she had actively sought help, the entire community would have known, thus exposing not only her, but her entire family to their judgement. I believe that she also felt compelled to protect her brother. Indeed, researcher Susan Lewis notes, "the closer the relationship between victim and assailant, the less likely the woman is to report the crime."[28]

According to the Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA), victims of incest may not report the incident because they have been told the behavior is normal, or because they care about the abuser.[29] I believe that both of these conditions applied to the above-quoted survivor, who stated at one point "I didn't know it was not normal." Furthermore, Ballantine and Soine state that incest, the most underreported sexual crime, is often hidden from relatives, communities, schools, and neighbors.[30] NOVA speculates that survivors may not know how to report, or where to turn for help.[31] My respondent related that she attempted to contact a nurse or a suicide hotline, but when they asked for her telephone number to call her back she hung up, fearing a family member would overhear or answer the return call. Now, as an adult, she still has

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[26] Margaret Ballantine and Lynne Soine, "Sibling Sexual Abuse — Uncovering the Secret," *Social Work Today* 12, no. 6 (2002): 18.
[27] Shanti Shapiro, "Self-mutilation and self-blame in incest victims," *American Psychological Association* 41, no. 1 (1987): 46.
[28] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 3.
[29] Network of Victim Assistance, "Incest."
[30] Ballantine and Soine, "Sibling Sexual Abuse," 18.
[31] Network of Victim Assistance, "Incest," http://www.novabucks.org/otherinformation/incest/.

not told a single family member what her brother did. When she returns home to visit she still sees her brother, which is why she has not been home to visit for years. Thus, the crimes continue to isolate her from her hometown and her family even years after they occurred.

Yet another survivor related how her childhood sexual assault by a prominent member of her church isolated her from the religious beliefs that had shaped her life until that time:

> I moved in with my godparents, and lived with them until they moved. [Her godfather was a prominent member of the local church]. The *problem* with living with them was . . . [that my godfather] used to, molest me . . . Uhm, he used to use his power [in the church] against me . . . and he, he told me if I ever told anyone about my experience with him that, I would go to hell, or *they* would go to hell . . . And, that -- the molesting . . . started when I was four, [or] it might have been younger. [This experience has] triggered a lot of PTSD and flashbacks.

She related that the assaults worsened with time. She shared a room with her godfather's young children, whom he also had sexually abused. As a result, she stated:

> because we were young, [we] thought it was normal. I thought it was normal. [So] we left it alone.

As she grew older, however, her relationship with her godfather became more violent. She related a violent and shocking episode in which her godfather raped her. I have hesitated to include this section, because of its graphic and personal nature; however, this survivor wished to have her story told in her own words. I have included it out of respect for her wishes, as well as her journey through life. She described the event thusly:

> The most traumatic experience, was when I was raped the first time. I was seven, and, in the [this] religion, when you're seven, it's the year that you, are, now accountable for all your sins. He . . . was going to teach me how to read out of the Bible, in the church [long pause]. And that was where [long pause] he raped me for the first time. [Long pause] . . . Because I was seven, and, there was a lot of blood . . . But the struggling part was, that, it was inside of a church, and it's supposed to be a holy sanction, a holy temple . . . I just laid there, and looked at all of the [pictures] on the

> wall, and I, was asking them for help. I was actually praying out loud, until he um, until he slapped me, and then I just prayed, silently. And it felt like all of the [pictures] were just watching me . . . I didn't feel like I was, a person for a long time, I just felt like. A thing. You know. I didn't feel like I had value.

She continued, saying that not only was her godfather a prominent member of their church, but he and his wife were also the only health aides in the community, limiting her ability to seek medical attention for the wounds he had inflicted on her. She speculated that his wife knew about the assaults, but "pretended like it didn't happen," continuing, "we all did." Besides feeling betrayed by her godparents, she felt that she could no longer depend on her religion to protect her. For a child who had grown up surrounded by religious teachings, this loss was particularly devastating, a theme she returned to multiple times within the interview. At one point she said:

> I didn't tell anyone [about the assault] because I felt like I deserved it . . . I thought that the Lord was punishing me for doing something wrong. [As I moved forward] I struggled with my identity . . . and, I - it overcame me, and it, and I, became very suicidal . . . [and] very, impulsive. I began abusing drugs to try to escape from it, but that only made it worse.

This response is not uncommon; survivors frequently turn to drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism to overcome traumatic experiences.[32] In "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse: A Test of Social Learning Formulations," Cooper, Russell and Davis write that alcohol is frequently used to lessen unpleasant emotions, and that people who have not learned positive coping strategies may turn to alcohol as an alternative.[33] Furthermore, they argue that those who turn to alcohol or substance abuse as a coping mechanism are more likely to engage in heavier drinking and alcohol abuse.[34] In "Immediate and Long Term Impacts of Childhood Sexual

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[32] Lynne M. Cooper, Marcia Russell, and William H. George, "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse: A Test of Social Learning Formulations," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 97, no. 2 (1988): 218.
[33] Cooper, Russell and George, "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse," 219.
[34] Cooper, Russell and George, "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse," 218.

Abuse," John Briere and Diana M. Elliot suggest that sustained substance abuse allows survivors of childhood sexual abuse to "separate psychologically from the environment, anesthetize painful internal states, and blur distressing memories."[35] Therefore, they contend that some "significant portion" of those currently addicted to substances may be attempting to self-medicate abuse-related depression, anxiety or posttraumatic stress disorder.[36] This relationship between adverse childhood experiences and alcohol abuse later in life deserves much more attention, considering that the University of Alaska Justice Center's 2015 Alaska Victimization Survey reports that Alaska's child sexual assault rates is six times the national average.[37]

Each of the survivors of childhood sexual assault I interviewed has lived with feelings of alienation and isolation, with nowhere to turn in their distress. Each has dealt with these feelings in a variety of ways, but all of them discussed their struggles with substance abuse as a coping mechanism for their pain.

3.2.2.2 Domestic Violence

In contrast to the shame survivors of sexual abuse felt, as though they had somehow been tarnished by the acts themselves, victims of domestic violence frequently spoke about the shame they felt for allowing their husbands to treat them in such a way. However, this shame often seemed to be tempered with a recognition that they had refrained from telling people or reporting, based on an urge to protect their husbands. For instance, one survivor related an

[35] John N. Briere, and Diana M. Elliott, "Immediate and Long-term Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse," *The Future of Children* (1994): 60.
[36] Briere and Elliot, "Immediate and Long-term Impacts," 60.
[37] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.

incident when her parents came to visit; beforehand she and her husband had discussed the best way to hide the bruises:

> I was like 'oh my God my dad's coming tomorrow!' I said 'what am I gonna do!?' and he said 'you could wear a sweater.' [Short, ironic laugh] 'or a long sleeve.' And then I was like - I said 'oh yeah a long sleeve shirt.'

The casualness of this conversation is particularly telling; in this interchange there is no mention of his remorse, or her anger that she had to hide her bruises to due to his abusive actions. Instead, there seemed to be an unspoken agreement that she would hide the physical evidence of his abuse. She was thus forced into silence to protect her husband's reputation, rather than being able to turn to her family for solace. A University of Nevada publication corroborated this observation, characterizing domestic violence as acts of "violence, power and coercion intended to control another person's behavior."[38] Her husband's physical abuse not only violated her right to be safe as well as her dignity, but it also controlled her response to the abuse, coercing her to hide the evidence of the abuse to protect his reputation. This survivor went on to state that when her father came to stay, the entire time:

> I wore a long sleeves . . . There were a couple times that we were sitting down and eating, like supper time, that I *almost* went like this [pushes sleeves up] and I catch myself, and like 'oh my gosh! I almost pulled my sleeves up!' [Sighs] So all the physical abuse, and all the bruises and everything, only my youngest sister knew. My other siblings or my parents didn't know about that.

Another survivor related her experience with domestic violence, describing an incident in which she threatened to tell the members of their community about the abuse.

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[38] Pamela Powell and Marilyn Smith, *Domestic Violence: An Overview* (University of Nevada, Reno: University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet-11-76, 2011) 1, http://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/cy/2011/fs1176.pdf.

> Every time when he lay hand on me I would pray to God to let no bruises or anything, try to hide them, in front of all them people that see me walk around the store. Even while I was watching TV he'd, punch my eyes, or beat me up. Finally I got tired of that and I said 'enough is enough, I'm tired of telling a lie about you, and, I'm gonna start telling 'em that you beat me up for no reason.' And then he got quiet.

She paused here, finally continuing:

> After that my [relative] told me to leave him. That I was gonna be under the ground pretty soon if I don't leave him. And [they were] right. So I left him and I divorced him.

I believe that by threatening to tell people about the abuse she suffered, she took the first step to breaking out of the isolation he had imposed on her. The silence that surrounds victims of domestic violence seems, then, to be the cage that keeps them with their partners. An article by Enrique Gracia entitled "Unreported Cases of Domestic Violence Against Women: Towards an Epidemiology of Social Silence, Tolerance, and Inhibition," notes that while society at large may be aware that domestic violence occurs, more often than not victims of these crimes are silenced.[39] Gracia further argues that the reasons domestic violence cases go unreported may be personal, stemming from embarrassment, fear of retaliation, and economic dependency, all of which I believe applied to this survivor during her marriage. This corresponds with another survivor's comment that it was not until after she left her abusive husband that she realized that she was capable of providing for herself.

> Even like in public he'd put me down . . . And then, [I started] feeling worthless, and, that I can't do things on my own, that . . . That I was dumb, and, that I couldn't hold a job.

[39] Enrique Gracia, "Unreported Cases of Domestic Violence Against Women: Towards an Epidemiology of Social Silence, Tolerance, and Inhibition," *Domestic Violence* (2004): 1.

Her husband's verbal abuse stifled her attempts to leave him for many years, as she struggled with her self-esteem and the fear that she could not succeed on her own. Over the course of her marriage, her husband's verbal abuse eroded her ability to trust individuals even outside of her marriage. She began to believe her husband's words.

Another survivor related the difficulties she had in trusting anyone after her husband became violent:

> [I have not told my family about] the mistreated part [of my marriage]. No. I can't . . . This is the first decision I ever made in my life, challenging my family . . . When my [child] was young, at the beginning when [my husband] run away, I let him run away, but I was not able to care for my son by myself . . . And then when I stop him from run away he would push me to the stairs – off the stairs – he would push me around. And then, I took it real personal, it's just like, the end of the world. 'If you can do this to me and then, everyone else can do this to me.' It's a logic that goes this way it's like, if you can treat me like this then, who treat me any better.

This response, not uncommon for victims of domestic violence, may partly explain their silence in the face of such mistreatment.[40] As a result of the intense feeling of betrayal by their spouses, most of the women with whom I spoke stated that they did not feel comfortable sharing personal information even with their closest relatives.

3.2.3 Normalization

A major theme that recurred within the interviews I conducted with survivors was the normalization of violence within their communities. Susan Lewis also found in her research on rural communities that attitudes towards sexual assault may appear relatively accepting.[41] Lewis suggests that family members sometimes dissuade a survivor from reporting, by convincing him

[40] Gracia. "Unreported Cases of Domestic Violence," 1.
[41] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 5.

or her that the violence is "just the way it is."[42] Such pressure can be especially effective in very remote communities where individuals are less frequently exposed to broader social norms.[43] Canadian researchers Moffitt and Fikowski observe that although it may be obvious to a rural community at large that a man is beating his wife, community members tend to accept the abuse, interpreting the situation as private.[44]

I questioned one survivor who was particularly forthcoming about the pervasiveness of violence within the community in which she had grown up. When I asked her what she believed caused the violence, she responded:

> I think because, it's so common, that people see [sexual and domestic violence] happening, they hear about it happening, and then they just, think, that 'oh, so and so who's older than me has done this, I can do this because they've done it . . . and no one's doing anything about it, it's okay - this is, normal.'

Another survivor confirmed the prevalence of violence, stating that when she became pregnant with her first child, she told her husband:

> 'I don't want my girl to be in the village.' And then [my husband] asked me why, I said 'cuz every single woman I've met, has experienced [sexual assault].'

The pervasiveness and normalization of this violence in some small, rural communities, can contribute to brazenness on the part of perpetrators. Normalization may also lead some individuals to perpetrate sexual or domestic violence because they truly do not recognize that they are both breaking the law and violating the victim. When no negative consequences follow crimes such as these, the lines between acceptable and unacceptable behavior can become

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[42] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 5.
[43] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 5.
[44] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 17.

blurred. Therefore, normalization goes hand-in-hand with the pervasiveness of both sexual and domestic violence.

In the remote northern Canadian communities they studied, Moffitt and Fikowski found that residents tended to excuse the violent behavior of inebriated males, while simultaneously condemning their female victims who consumed alcohol, further perpetuating such violence.[45] The authors related an incident recounted during one of the focus groups they held, wherein multiple men sexually assaulted an inebriated, unconscious woman. "These men take no responsibility for their actions. In fact, they allege that it is the woman's fault because she should not have been drinking. There is no demonstrated understanding that . . . sexual acts require consent between two people," the authors wrote.[46] The tendency not to report, along with the social expectation that victims of such crimes should not report, contributes to normalization of sexual and domestic violence, creating what Moffitt and Fikowski term a "culture of violence."[47]

In some communities, the normalization of such violent acts may extend as far as condemning the victim for speaking out. One survivor related:

> I know this girl … and she got kicked out of her house, because she, uhm, stood up for her daughter. Who was three. Who her grandfather had raped. And, she told her mom it wasn't okay, and her mom kicked her out, because she said, 'it happened to *all* of us, this is our culture.'

This survivor disagreed that "this is our culture," arguing that although child sexual assault may occur frequently, she could not believe that these violent actions represented her culture. Another of my respondents, an elder and survivor explained how the multigenerational incidence of sexual assault within families could contribute to its being seen as part cultural.

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[45] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 19.
[46] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 19.
[47] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 5.

> There are those that have been hurt really bad that … they perpetrate this on someone else … And long time ago I [was talking to a] young man [who] actually told me, because we were talking about incest, and he said 'well you know it's, it's cultural.' I said 'No, I don't think so.' But he believed it was … I said 'well, that's, that's something that's been learned … It's not a natural behavior.' So, sometimes it's ingrained so bad that, that it's really hard to flip that around and talk about.

He clarified that when these violent acts are perpetrated against young individuals, they may come to believe that they are not only normal, but to be expected. He said that it is now the task of the younger generation, as well as people working within the field of sexual assault and domestic violence to "get that flipped around so that, men understand that that's … not really what they're supposed to be doing."

One survivor whom I interviewed was not from Alaska, nor from a rural setting. A short time after arriving in Alaska, she met a man who was born and raised in a remote Alaskan community. Soon after they were married he became violent toward her and aggressive around their newborn child. This survivor struggled to understand the origins of her husband's violent outbreaks. She spoke of the regular anger expressed and violence unleashed in his family.

> His brother stabbed him. Like, was a huge knife and they were … transferring [my husband to a hub community for urgent care]. And then, his brother was in jail for a month, and then [when he got out of prison] they pretended like nothing happened. … So the family would be like, when they get mad, they say very mean things to each other. And – and then they would pretend nothing happened … It's – it's weird … A lot of conflict … He doesn't know how to, channel that, emotion.

She related that his family urged her to stay with her husband, even after she told them of his violence toward her. Within her family, she stated, this would be unheard of; violence would not be tolerated. As she realized that she was expected to normalize his actions in the same way that his family did, she struggled with whether she could maintain her ties with his family.

This response from the families of both abusers and abused is not uncommon. Families often pressure survivors not to create waves within the community. Moffitt and Fikowski found that women are shamed and blamed for disrupting community cohesion by speaking out against their abusive partners.[48] Similarly, Susan Lewis noted that an informal, underlying value of rural communities stresses the importance of family reputation over personal justice or safety.[49] I heard several variations of this theme during my interviews, as women expressed their anger and hurt as their families pressed them to remain in abusive relationships. One survivor described her frustration as her family urged her to stay with her husband, despite the violence that had left her hospitalized. She related a conversation in which her mother counseled her to remain with her husband:

> Every time she [my mother] tells me my kids dad will change, my kids need their dad, I ask her 'when? when he's sixty, like dad?' Because we're all grown up now and, now he [my father] wants to change.

She related how she finally decided to leave this toxic relationship, despite the expectations of her family and community members.

Sociologist Judy Shepherd reported similar conditions in "Where Do You Go When It's Forty Below?" in which she quoted a rural Alaska resident who said: "there's a norm against causing trouble. People say you're troublemaker when you put someone in jail."[50] Many of these problems have existed in rural communities for several generations, making justice an elusive concept.

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[48] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 7.
[49] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 5.
[50] Judy Shepherd, "Where Do You Go When It's 40 Below? Domestic Violence Among Rural Alaska Native Women,"*Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 16, no. 4 (2001): 497.

3.2.4 Cyclicality

The most common theme that I encountered in my interviews was the cyclicality of sexual and domestic violence. The cycle of violence presented itself in a number of ways; while some survivors discussed the abuse that previous generations of their family had suffered, other survivors spoke about witnessing their adult children turn to drugs, alcohol, or abusive relationships to cope with the trauma they had experienced as children. Furthermore, almost every survivor with whom I spoke stated that the person who had abused her or him had suffered the same type of abuse in the past. In this way, every survivor of domestic violence whom I interviewed was abused by a man who had been raised in an abusive household. In two of the four cases that involved sexual assault, the abuser had also been sexually assaulted. The frequency of this pattern indicates that as sexual and domestic violence occurs, it triggers negative responses within the community, perpetuating the cycle of violence. A survivor and elder with whom I spoke reflected:

> I was talking to [a friend] one time … about all these issues and how, you know how we see so much of the domestic violence, the substance abuse … and where that comes from …. He said 'well you know what a vampire is, don't you?' I said 'Yeah.' He said 'you know what happens when you get bit by a vampire?' I said, 'Yeah.' He said 'What do you think happens?' I said Well, everything you read about vampires is, you usually turn into a vampire. Then what do vampires do? They go bite somebody else.' So he said if we look … at our generational issues, a vampire started way long time ago, and, it just keeps creating a vampire, and the vampire keeps doing, what vampires do. And so we can look at what the vampire, when he's biting he's passing on, domestic violence, he's passing on, incest, he's passing on child sexual abuse, he's just passing on all these really ugly, ugly things.

It is important to note here that this anecdote represents a greatly oversimplified view of the issues surrounding both sexual assault and domestic violence; while victims of sexual and

domestic violence sometimes go on to become perpetrators of similar crimes, research suggests that the majority do not. Nationally 30 percent of sexual offenders report a history of sexual abuse.[51] However, it is also important to acknowledge that the cyclical nature of sexual and domestic violence is well recognized by elders, professionals and survivors with whom I spoke.

One survivor related the reasons that she decided to leave her abusive partner:

> I've been thinking a lot, and talking to my mom. Cuz I know if I go back [to my partner], my kids are gonna live this life I'm living [in a violent relationship]. Cuz my mom lived it. My grandma lived it. I really don't want my kids to, live - live like this. Cuz my... my grandma was always running away. She told us stories of sleeping in the grass. My mom was always running away, with us. And then I noticed myself, I was running away, too. Always running away from violence. And... I know I just have to make it stop.

This survivor spoke poignantly about how generations of abuse have led to the normalization of such acts. She further described her frustration as her family urged her to stay with her husband, despite his abuse of her. She noted that because violence was ever-present, both personally and generationally, it had become normal part of everyday life. She described an incident in which her father broke a window and dragged her mother out of it; she had been a small child, and stood by as the police arrived and began beating her father. She recalled:

> We got used to seeing that like that was a normal . . . Like it's normal in the village to see things like that. [Pause] My kids, they've seen and heard how their dad talked to me. But I don't want that no more.

A common theme throughout my interviews was women seeking to break this cycle and model healthy relationships for their children. Many struggled with the difficulties of leaving their husbands against their family or community members' wishes, to provide the safest home possible for their children. Holt, Buckley, and Whelana found that violence can be inter-

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[51] M.I. Glasser et al., "Cycle of Child Sexual Abuse: Links Between Being a Victim and Becoming a Perpetrator," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 179, no. 6 (2001): 488. http://bjp.rcpsych.org/content/179/6/482

generationally transmitted, and that young adults who had been exposed to parental violence as children were 189 percent, or nearly three times, more likely than those not exposed to experience violence in their own adult relationships.[52] Although far from all children who have been exposed to violent relationships at a young age repeat the cycle, the increase in risk factors for inter-generational violence and cyclicality are strikingly high.

In another form of cyclicality, survivors return to abusive relationships due to their familiarity with them. One survivor of childhood sexual assault related how she found herself in consecutive abusive relationships into adulthood, culminating in an incident of violent rape perpetrated by a close friend. She reflected:

> He [the perpetrator] was the greatest person I'd ever met, at the time … but then I came to realize that, because of the trauma that happened to me when I was younger, that I was an easy target for guys like him, who just wanted to use me, and, abuse me … And um, I realized that, there was a pattern, in my life, with me, befriending people like them [violent offenders]. And I realized that I was comfortable, with - with men that would do those things. I was comfortable with their personality … Because that's the only … human relationship, that I knew. It's the only one that I can think of as a child, that was really strong, and it was strong in the negative way.

While not all survivors of sexual and domestic violence find themselves in similar relationships in the future, this interviewee related the struggle she faced trying to break away from the negative pattern modeled for her as a child. She continued to describe the ways in which interpersonal violence affected her self-image, and the difficulties she faced in breaking that pattern.

> I kept living my life ... but, it became … like I didn't deserve anything, good … And it's strange when I word it this way, because it makes it sound like I missed it. Because it ties back to the fact that I was

[52] Stephanie Holt, Helen Buckley, Sadhbh Whelana, "The Impact of Exposure to Domestic Violence on Children and Young People: A Review of the Literature," *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 32 (2008): 806.

> comfortable with it – it was uncomfortable to live my life any other way. And it took me a long time to try to break that.

This survivor was particularly reflective of the role that sexual abuse had played in shaping her outlook on the world, and she believed that the childhood sexual assault that she had experienced led her into a cycle of dysfunctional relationships. Research documents this pattern. Jennie Noll, in "Does Childhood Sexual Abuse Set in Motion a Cycle of Violence Against Women? What We Know and What We Need to Learn," reports that childhood sexual abuse significantly increases the risk of subsequent sexual and physical victimization. A persistent cycle of violence perpetrated against women may begin in childhood in the form of sexual abuse.[53] The relationship between childhood trauma and subsequent substance abuse and victimization is critical to understanding the cyclicality of these phenomena. Many survivors turn to substance abuse, and fall into further victimization in adulthood. Approximately one half of women who have been sexually assaulted were drinking alcohol at the time.[54] As one elder whom I interviewed put it, as a result of the trauma that survivors have suffered they turn to drugs and or alcohol to numb the pain, which, she stated, "always gets them raped again."

The previously quoted survivor said that recognizing her interpersonal relationships as a cycle of abuse stemming from her early childhood abuse provided the impetus to turn away from this pattern. However, due to her empathy for her abuser, she struggled with her decision to report him to authorities.

> I did [report my abuser to authorities]. And he actually ended up going to a treatment center instead of jail. Which I guess is understandable because

[53] Jennie G. Noll, "Does Childhood Sexual Abuse Set in Motion a Cycle of Violence Against Women? What We Know and What We Need to Learn," *Journal of interpersonal violence* 20, no. 4 (2005): 456.
[54] Antonia Abbey et al., "Sexual Assault and Alcohol Consumption: What Do We Know About Their Relationship and What Types of Research are Still Needed?" *Aggression and violent behavior* 9, no. 3 (2004): 272.

> he, he also did some things to other girls that he told me about … [The girls] were, his little [pause] sister's friends. She was six. It was a pattern. He was molested by his, uncle … And he just - thought it was okay.

His disclosure to her that he had also been a victim of child sexual abuse complicated her decision to report him, as she felt empathy for him, and she could relate to the trauma he had experienced. She paused before saying:

> There was something inside him that was reaching out … and I think that's why he told me about these incidents with the younger girls. Because he felt guilty … I do [feel guilty about turning him in], a *lot*. I feel like I ruined his [life].

Survivors express a variety of forms of empathy or compassion for perpetrators. Although most individuals I interviewed did not empathize with their abusers to the degree illustrated in the quotation above, they nearly always excused, at least in part, their abusers' actions by referencing the abuser's history of sexual or domestic violence. While I have not found literature documenting victims' identification with their abusers, Briere and Elliot did note that victims of childhood sexual assault frequently blame themselves for the actions perpetrated against them, rather than blaming the perpetrator.[55] Briere and Elliot's research leads me to wonder whether the previously quoted survivor may have been blaming herself for failing to prevent the assault, rather than blaming the man who raped her. Briere and Elliot observe: "women with a history of child sexual abuse were more likely to attribute the cause of negative events to internal . . . factors, as well as to their character and . . . (that is, 'this negative event happened to me because I am an inherently bad person and I will never change.')"[56] Although I cannot say definitively that these were the emotions that this survivor experienced, I believe that Briere and Elliot's findings partially correlated with my respondent's feelings of empathy for her

[55] Briere and Elliot, "Immediate and Long-term Impacts," 56-57.
[56] Briere and Elliot, "Immediate and Long-term Impacts," 57.

abuser, and the guilt that she expressed for not being able to help him. Furthermore, Sara Bernard's article in *The Atlantic* relates the story of a young girl named Jane, whose father's attempts to molest and assault her on multiple occasions had caused her to speak openly of the abuse. When a state trooper approached, hoping to press charges against the man, Jane stated: "'my first thought was, 'I can't do that,' . . . Jane felt she'd already done enough damage . . . by mentioning the molestation . . . she felt she'd already, to some degree, destroyed his life."[57] These words came back to me as I interviewed the previously quoted survivor, who only approached law enforcement officials regarding the rape to protect other young women from experiencing similar violence. Briere and Elliot note that individuals who have been victims of childhood sexual assault frequently have low self-esteem, and high rates of anxiety and depression. Such low self-esteem and anxiety may have led this survivor to act in the interest of others, rather than to seek justice for herself.[58]

> When you feel like [sexual abuse is] just happening to *you* it's okay. But when, you find out, that it's happening to someone else other than you, then that makes it not okay. That makes it – unacceptable, and. I did it [turned her abuser into the authorities] for the little girls back home, that he had molested, so that they wouldn't have to go through that again, so that they wouldn't... have to... experience it anymore. Cuz no one deserves it.

The final example of cyclicality survivors noted was seeing their own children turn to drugs, alcohol, or violence as they grew. Most survivors understood that this was a coping mechanism for the trauma that their children had experienced in an abusive household, and they wondered whether they could have done more to support them. Research shows that individuals who were raised in violent homes are much more likely to experience or perpetrate violence, or

[57] Sara Bernard, "Rape Culture in the Alaskan Wilderness," *The Atlantic,* September 11, 2014.
[58] Briere and Elliot, "Immediate and Long-term Impacts," 57.

turn to illicit substances to cope.[59] One survivor of domestic violence stated that after she and her children left her abusive husband, the children began to act out; eventually her son began to abuse drugs and alcohol. She told me:

> And then [my son] started, getting into – I mean, I didn't know he was getting into like smoking marijuana, huffing, all this other stuff. Because I was, paying so much attention to, like work, – make sure we have enough money for. And then he overdosed.

Adult children who turned to drugs or alcohol was a common theme within my interviews, although survivors tended not to dwell on it. Although several interviewees mentioned that their children were either in abusive relationships or addicted to substances, they tended to move on quickly. I believe that exploring the reasons behind their children's life choices was too painful. One survivor said, "I still owe them. Like I owe them for what I put them through." However, she also said that she worked hard to break the cycle of abuse, connecting her son with counselors and school nurses, and alerting his teachers of his condition to make sure that he received the best care possible. As a result, he is now a paramedic in a hub community, and no longer abuses substances. She stated proudly:

> It was at one point, my youngest [child] was like 'mom, do you realize all your kids are in helping positions?'

The statistics pertaining to cyclicality do not apply to every individual who has been raised in violent homes, or has experienced sexual or domestic violence. Moreover, as Briere and Elliot point out, statistical analyses are "well known for glossing over individual differences and producing generalizations that, although valid for the group, may not be accurate for any given

[59] Holt, Buckley, and Whelana, "The Impact of Exposure to Domestic Violence," 806; Kilpatrick et al., "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse," 11-12.

individual subject."[60] Many of the survivors I interviewed stressed the need to talk about the abuse in their lives, as well as the importance of standing by their children to break the cycle. The literature on domestic abuse supports this notion that children who have come from violent homes or experiences, yet are nurtured and cared for by their parents, are far less likely to engage in self-harming behaviors.[61] Much depends on the severity and length of the violence witnessed or experienced by the individual.[62]

3.2.5 Moving Forward

I spoke to many of these survivors about what helped them move past the abuses they have experienced, and what allows them move forward in life. Most of the survivors I interviewed stated that they worked hard to keep both their bodies and their minds busy, and occupied so as not to dwell on events from their past. While some survivors said they did this by cooking, others made clothing or jewelry in their free time. One survivor explained to me:

> I listen to my Grandma's advice. She told me once, she said 'if you get sick or if you follow … [your] pains and be 'oh I cannot get up I'm having too much pain' everything will get worse … But if you get up and try to do something like exercising, your pain will go away. Will give you more strength that way.' Some days I can't get up in the morning but then I exercise and I pray to God to give me strength, and then I come to work.

In many remote communities in Alaska, there are few jobs or ways to stay busy outside of subsistence activities. These remarkable survivors said they worked hard to keep themselves busy and to avoid the stagnation that many other community members experienced. One survivor

[60] Briere and Elliot, "Immediate and Long-term Impacts," 63.
[61] Briere and Elliot, "Immediate and Long-term Impacts," 56-57; Kilpatrick et al., "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse," 11-12.
[62] Noll, "Does Childhood Sexual Abuse," 457; Kilpatrick et al., "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse," 12.

related how children are affected by being surrounded by inactivity, or by unhealthy or illegal behaviors:

> I did realize my, [children], they were just surrounded by, people, that, don't go to work, they just wanna bootleg, they wanna be high, they're... collecting dollars, and, my [relative] was always stealing money from me. And... You-you saw my [child]. Like, pretending to go to jail, and, like [they] kinda thought it was cool to, go to jail, and be cuffed.

However, she went on, she felt that by keeping busy, and taking pride in her work she was able to move forward.

> I've been crocheting, lots of hats. And selling them … It makes me feel better to complete something. A hat or, frying bread or, beading. I've sold a couple of stretchy bracelets [that] I made with those little tiny beads.

She brought out the bracelets at this point in the interview and proudly showed them off. That pride is something, it seemed, that she had not felt often in her life.

Another common way that survivors moved beyond their past trauma was to help other people. This process seemed to remind them that they are not alone in the world, and that they have something valuable to give back to the community around them. One survivor stated:

> I want them [other survivors] to be able to realize that they can have successful lives, they don't have to stay here and be drunks, and have to, you know, feel bad for themselves, and live their lives in depression, thinking that, they can't amount to anything. I don't want them to fall into the same pattern that, previous generations have. [Helping people] is a healing process. It's like I feel better, about myself, when I help other people … Because I feel like, I'm, giving something *back*, into, their lives, and into the community.

Most survivors referenced helping others in a variety of ways. While some fostered children, others worked as Sexual Assault Reponses Team Nurses, and one started an initiative in her home community to remove children from abusive homes. This, they said, helped them to feel that they could assist others who had gone through similar traumas, to make sure that other

victims and survivors had the resources that they needed to move forward.

3.3 Conclusion

The survivors interviewed in the course of my research were both open and eager to relay their stories. Many individuals thanked me after their interviews, and several stated that every time they speak about their experience it helps them to move forward. Although there were several portions of the interviews that were particularly graphic, I believe that survivors hoped that their words and experiences would help other victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence feel less alone.

Nevertheless, it is important to note here that these findings are not representative of all survivors of sexual and domestic violence, nor do they represent Alaska's or other rural areas as a whole. However, in the fourteen interviews that I conducted, every interviewee referenced the cyclical nature of these events. Furthermore, I found that many participants referenced the extreme community isolation, substance abuse, and a culture of normalization found in many rural Alaskan communities. These issues are clearly many-faceted and complex, and these variables I have identified through my research may not be fully representative of other survivors' experiences. Yet I can say with confidence following the interviews with these courageous survivors, that breaking the cycle of silence surrounding this violence is critical to ending the abuse itself.

In the following chapter I will address professionals' experiences and impressions of working in western Alaskan communities.

Chapter 4 Professionals' Perspectives on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence in Rural Alaska

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes my interviews with professionals in the field of sexual assault and domestic violence in rural Alaska. I completed eight interviews with professionals who worked in a variety of fields. Some of the professionals whom I interviewed were themselves survivors of sexual and/or domestic assault. Some individuals in those situations preferred to discuss their experiences as former victims and survivors, rather than to discuss their professional work. Therefore, I have analyzed six professional interviews in this chapter. I received permission prior to all professional interviews to use their names, locations, and exact job titles. However, to reveal this information could identify the location in which I performed my interviews with survivors of sexual and domestic violence crimes. Because anonymity for these survivors is of the utmost importance for both their safety and privacy, I have chosen not to reveal the names or offices of the professionals whom I interviewed. For the sake of clarity, however, I have assigned each professional a pseudonym (Table 1).

Ruth	Assistant District Attorney; specialist in sexual assault cases
Justin	Alaska State Trooper; member of the Violent Offender's Unit
Amber	Women's shelter employee; in charge of relocating women to safety
Paul	Mentor in the Engaging Young Men and Boys Program.
Julie	Former head of a rural Alaskan women's shelter
Sharon	Co-founder of an Alaskan women's shelter; former shelter legal advocate

Table 1: Professionals

4.2 Findings

As I analyzed my interviews with professionals I was struck by the number of common themes that emerged, despite the wide diversity of work performed by the interviewees. Furthermore, as with the themes that emerged in my interviews with survivors, each theme seemed to be connected, forming a chain of interrelated and overlapping social pathologies in which one problem tended to lead to, or exacerbate another. Many of the problems discussed by professionals are cyclical in nature; from the acts of sexual assault and domestic violence themselves, to offshoot pathologies such as alcohol and drug abuse; it is rare that these problems either arise or dissipate in isolation. External influences compound these pathologies, including community remoteness, lack of services and funding, multigenerational trauma, normalization of such violence, negative community response, and underreporting of crimes (Fig 2). For instance, if a community is known for normalizing violent acts within the community, this may lead to fewer victims reporting crime. This may then perpetuate a cycle in which the community stigmatizes those who step forward, because they disrupt the apparent peace within the community.

Figure 1: Interconnectedness

Professionals specifically identified aggravating circumstances including a lack of funding and services; drug and/or alcohol abuse; isolation; the cyclicality that surrounds these crimes, often in the form of multigenerational trauma; and negative community responses. The following section will highlight the factors that professionals believe have led to high rates of sexual assault and domestic violence in rural Alaskan communities, and how each professional agency or organization has struggled to provide appropriate care.

4.2.1 Contextual Contributors to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence

Many factors complicate providing high quality care to survivors of sexual and domestic violence in rural Alaska communities. Isolated areas often fail to draw applicants for high-stress positions, such as mental health professionals, police officers, and nurses. As a result, many offices are understaffed most of the time. While all of the professionals with whom I spoke strove to provide the highest quality care possible, stress related to understaffing complicated their jobs. The following section speaks to these contextual factors, and the logistical challenges that service providers encounter in their work.

4.2.1.1 Understaffing and Underfunding of Agencies and Offices that Address Such Problems

Many of the professionals with whom I spoke discussed the immense case-loads their offices face, often while insufficiently staffed. For example, Assistant District Attorney Ruth stressed the logistical difficulties presented by the variety and number of cases she sees:

> I'm an Assistant District Attorney here in [location]. We're not a big office . . . Based on the budgetary cuts we were just cut down to six attorneys out here, which is incredible given that we've got the highest rates of sexual assaults and domestic violence in the nation. Alaska leads the country, and

> western Alaska leads Alaska, in both of these areas . . . So, from two [of the] villages [that this office serves], I have . . . seventy assigned felonies, that range anywhere from murder, to sex assault, to strangulation. Of those seventy felonies, forty-one of them are sexual assault cases.

Ruth gestured to a map on the wall, pointing to the huge swath of Alaska that her office serves, often while shorthanded. She explained further that she is one of only two attorneys in her location who prosecutes sexual assault and domestic violence cases. This is a shockingly low number of prosecutors, considering that the rate of sexual assault in the state of Alaska is two and a half times that of the United States.[1] She emphasized the pervasiveness of the problem(s):

> There is not a single person I've talked to, whether it's a victim, whether it's a victim's family member, for sexual abuse of a minor case, a parent, who has not themselves dealt with sexual assault and sexual abuse. It is - it's not something new, for anybody that we're talking to, which I think is, really sad, and a real problem.

Meanwhile, Ruth related that her office provides legal services for other cases. She told me:

> whether it's a misdemeanor domestic violence assault, whether it's a misdemeanor driving violation, [it] comes to me, [laughs] or like, you know I had a case that I declined yesterday that's a misdemeanor: a guy stole ten dollars in Tastykakes from the store.

Similarly, Justin, the Alaska State Trooper (AST) with whom I spoke emphasized the difficulty in "juggling" the high volume and wide variety of cases, spread over a large geographic region:

> So I mean you'd be doing (a) assault for domestic violence case one minute, then doing a sexual assault victim and review at the hospital the next minute, and then you'd be breaking from that, going to a criminal trespass at the store, and then, you know, you break from that, cuz now you got a homicide, and you're trying to type search warrants up for that, while you're taking other calls . . . So you pick up, you know, twenty, thirty, forty, sexual [assault cases], maybe a homicide or two, plus, you know two hundred other cases, and it's – it's a juggling act … you gotta

[1] *Alaska Victimization Survey* (Anchorage, Alaska: University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center, February 26, 2016), http://uaajusticecenter.blogspot.com/2016/02/alaska-victimization-survey-results.html.

> prioritize . . . you do the best possible job that you can. But inherently, law enforcement numbers – personnel-wise—are usually pretty low. Ah, I mean, you got twenty-five thousand calls a year for service for the [location we're in], and maybe twelve cops.

This Trooper is one of three in his service area who comprise the local Violent Offenders Unit (VOU), which, he emphasized, responds to "sexual assault and sexual abuse of a minor; and *major* crimes." However, while the VOU are the main responders for violent sexual and domestic crimes, due to understaffing they are also responsible for the multitude of other, lower level crimes reported in the area. Justin's statement above illustrates constant interruptions, as he responds to one legal infraction after another, while trying to provide the highest quality service in each case. He clarifies the sexual assault and sexual abuse of a minor cases in his region comprise between 30 and 34 percent of the calls in the state of Alaska. Furthermore, he states that while the VOU is not able to process all the violent sexual crimes reported in the service area due to understaffing, they respond to 30 to 40 percent of them directly. State Troopers, police officers, and peace officers not a part of the VOU oversee responding to less violent sexual crimes that are reported to the department. With Alaska's sexual assault rate at nearly three times the national average, and the child sexual assault rates at six times the national average, Trooper Justin's emphasis on the frenetic pace of each day, prioritization and multitasking is hardly surprising.[2]

Amber, a women's shelter employee, similarly discussed the high number of cases the shelter sees, noting that they often have women sleeping on the couches or the floor. Although she assured me that the shelter never turns anyone seeking asylum away, she explained:

> The periods of having more folks here than we're able to hold seem to outweigh the times when we have plenty of space for folks coming in.

[2] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.

Amber is responsible for ensuring the safety of incoming women; as such, she feels the burden of providing safe quarters to women regardless of the occupancy level of the shelter. In addition to the large number of women this facility shelters from the hub and surrounding communities, personnel must relocate some victims in communities further away to ensure their safety. However, other shelters in the region experience equally high rates of domestic and sexual assault victims seeking security and, she noted, they are similarly understaffed.

4.2.1.2 Transient Work Force

The transient nature of the work force in remote Alaska communities exacerbates understaffing. Professionals typically rotate through remote communities before moving into other, less remote, lower stress jobs. ADA Ruth explained that the severity of the weather in the region causes professionals to leave before long.

> There are days where it's negative 30, negative 40 [degrees Fahrenheit] *blowing* wind, and it can be like that for weeks on end, and it's so hard those weeks.

People who have moved to this location from more temperate climates often have trouble adjusting.

Similarly, Justin reports that the State Troopers receive a low number of applicants state-wide, frustrating their attempts to find long-term qualified employees. Furthermore, he reported that it takes "around a year" to replace a State Trooper who has departed the area, leaving their office short-staffed until a new one is hired.

> The turnover is constant. [Over the course of two years] … this post, rotated everybody in and out of it like I think twice. People promoted, people went to other jobs, … so, that's where you find us like right now we're – half-staff.

UAA Justice Professor, Darryl Wood's article "Police Turnover in Isolated Communities: The Alaska Experience," reports that police officer turnover rates are high in rural communities nationwide, and that officers serving these areas usually serve less time with their agencies than officers located in metropolitan centers.[3] Furthermore, the smaller the police department, the higher is the turnover rate.

High turnover and understaffing compound the intrinsic stress professionals and paraprofessionals who work with victims of sexual and domestic violence tend to experience owing to the horrific nature of the crimes they address and the trauma the victims undergo. The need to coordinate with other professionals compounds the stress further. The continual turnover of employees, all requiring new training and familiarization, increases the demands on longer term employees tasked with training incoming workers. Ruth spoke of the challenges of high turn-over when describing the multi-disciplinary team of professionals with whom she works. This team, which includes children's advocates, State Troopers, police officers, mental health professionals, and hospital staff, come together once to twice per month in a confidential environment to discuss potential aid for victims. However, the transient nature of the professional workforce within the community hinders the full engagement of all agencies:

> The team, is only as strong, as its players, right? . . . Let's say the head of [mental health services] leaves . . . before they've hired the new person. How does the new person even know we exist? Who is telling them that they should be part of our world? . . . Our biggest challenge is the transient nature of the community, particularly amongst professionals.

The time and energy required for outreach to professionals in alternate fields, while managing everyday caseloads, can be overwhelming. Ruth is certain that this multi-disciplinary team is

[3] Darryl Wood, "Police Turnover in Isolated Communities: The Alaska Experience," *National Institute of Justice Journal* 247 (2001): 17.

worthwhile; they prioritize cases that are sensitive in nature, ensuring that victims receive the best possible support. However, she also explained that this valuable dialogue can only occur with trained and dedicated people in professional positions. When new professionals cycle through on a regular basis, it can be difficult to keep new employees informed on current cases and interdisciplinary help strategies.

In a similar vein, Trooper Justin spoke of the difficulty in maintaining adequate services for survivors of sexual assault due to the transience of forensic nurses. These nurses in this community work alongside Justin as part of a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). Like the Trooper attachment, their office is often understaffed and their services in high demand. After a sexual assault occurs, with the consent of the victim, a SART nurse collects a "sexual assault kit," which takes several hours to complete, and involves photographs, measurements, and swabbing of genital areas.[4] This process can be traumatizing to the victim, and can also be a long and emotional ordeal for the nurses. Justin explained:

> We have a tendency to filter through SART nurses . . . Sometimes we'll go six months without one. It is [a hard job] especially when you look at the numbers we have coming in here . . . We've usually got one or two SART nurses here . . . and, it's not even their primary job. Most of them are working clinic or working ER [Emergency Room] and then, the SART program is supplemental to whatever they're doing. Sometimes we don't have a SART nurse on call and we end up having to send a victim to [a city] because we don't have a SART nurse available here . . . We burn 'em out.

SART nurses play a critical role in reporting and prosecuting sexual assault crimes; without a local forensic team available it can be difficult, if not impossible, to gather DNA evidence for trial. Trooper Justin explained that due to the shortage of SART nurses in this

[4] Shannyn Moore, "Rape kit backlog reflects failure of justice in Alaska," *Alaska Dispatch News,* September 3, 2016.

community, sexual assault victims are sometimes required to wait up to twelve hours to be seen and processed.

Laura Johnson in "Frontier of Injustice: Alaska Native Victims of Domestic Violence" relates that depending on weather conditions, it may take between one and six days to relocate a victim to a hub-community with a SART nurse.[5] SART exams are meant to both ensure the health and safety of the victim, and to collect evidence for prosecution of the crime. Victims may not only find the lengthy exam humiliating, but the wait for an exam intolerable, as they are discouraged from urinating or washing to preserve DNA evidence.[6] Once in the exam room, SART nurses take close-up photos of any bruises or contusions on the victim; swab the inside of the vagina with a blue dye to identify any scratches that have occurred; and take notes and measurements of injuries on the body. Ruth emphasized, "it's not an easy process."

Amber, the shelter employee, further elucidated why victims often hesitate to report when communities do not have SART nurses:

> When I'm like 'yeah, we'll fly you in [to this hub], we'll put you up in a place to stay, we'll get you food, like you just show up,' people are much more inclined to come make the report and get the [SART] exam done. As soon as you start talking about, 'well we don't have a nurse here, so, we have to send you into [a city], but we'll take care of everything,' fifty percent of the people decide that they don't want to report . . . It is definitely a major barrier.

Amber believes that the hesitation to report stems from victims' reluctance to travel so far from home to have an invasive exam performed. Most people from surrounding communities are familiar with the hub community where Amber works. For individuals who have lived in remote communities their entire lives, traveling to a large city can be daunting, especially in the wake of

[5] Moore, "Rape Kit Backlog," 2016.
[6] Moore, "Rape Kit Backlog," 2016.

a sexual assault. Amber described one work week in which seven victims of sexual assault called the women's shelter seeking help scheduling a SART exam. However, when they were told that there was no SART nurse currently on duty and they would be required to fly to a city to have the exam performed, all seven declined both reporting the crime and the exam. This is merely one example of how underfunding and understaffing in this remote hub-community has led directly to underreporting of sexual assault crimes across a region of Alaska. Within each surrounding community additional obstacles hinder reporting and prosecution, including a lack of police presence.

4.2.1.3 Lack of Police Presence in Remote Communities

Many remote communities lack an official police presence. Instead, paraprofessionals serve as first responders in more isolated communities.[7] These include three distinct groups: Village Police Safety Officers (VPSOs), Village Police Officers (VPOs), and Tribal Police Officers (TPOs). None of these categories have the same legal standing as police officers; they have the same legal standing as a private citizen.[8]

Of the peace officers, VPSOs receive by far the most training. They must possess a high school diploma or equivalent, and have a clean criminal record.[9] VPSOs are also required to attend fifteen weeks of training at the Alaska Law Enforcement Academy, two weeks of Rural Fire Protection Specialist class, a one week Emergency Trauma Technician class, along with

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[7] Darryl S. Wood et al., "Police Presence, Isolation, & Sexual Assault Prosecution," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 22, no. 3 (2011): 331, DOI: 10.1177/0887403410375980.
[8] Laura S. Johnson, "Frontier of Injustice: Alaska Native Victims of Domestic Violence," *The Modern American*, 8 (2012): 7, http://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1168&context=tma.
[9] Alaska Department of Public Safety: State Troopers, "Village Public Safety Officers," (Anchorage, Alaska), https://dps.alaska.gov/ast/vpso/faq.

annual training.[10] VPSOs are not state employees, but are employed by the regional native non-profit or borough in which the VPSO resides.[11] Thus, VPSOs work and are supervised only by the Corporation that hires them, although their law enforcement activity is overseen by the Alaska State Troopers, with whom they are expected to work closely. In contrast, VPOs and TPOs receive just two weeks of training and are not required to have a high school diploma or a GED.[12] While they are expected to provide the same on-the-ground law enforcement services, they receive less pay, and are overseen by their local village or tribal entity, rather than a regional corporation.

In spite of their limited qualifications and training, VPSOs, VPOs and TPOs in very remote communities are often the first responders on the scene of a crime, and are frequently required to secure the scene until law enforcement personnel arrive. Additionally, they manage minor crimes locally, such as underage drinking and petty theft.[13]

ADA Ruth contends that VPOs, TPOs, and VPSOs have "the toughest job in [western Alaska]." Often, she states, the people who volunteer to work such jobs are generally young men, seeking to help their communities. However, she clarifies:

> They get not enough training . . . Many of them, [have] not graduated high school … [but] they're the only people you can get to do the job. You're not going to get a regular . . . trained, police officer who's been to a major academy, to go to a [small village]. The village can't pay them enough.

Another reason people hesitate to work in law enforcement or public safety in small communities relates to the interrelatedness of community members. Ruth asserts that the individuals who fill

[10] Alaska Department of Public Safety, "Village Public Safety Officers."
[11] Alaska Department of Public Safety, "Village Public Safety Officers."
[12] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 331.
[13] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 331.

such positions often must investigate their friends, family, and neighbors; in a village of one hundred people, the size of many villages in the region, a safety officer may be investigating all three. In addition, as the first responders on the scene of a crime, public safety officers often walk into potentially violent or dangerous situations, unarmed and occasionally without backup. Responding to these calls has proved fatal for some peace officers who have attempted to subdue violent, inebriated, or armed community members, which makes potential applicants for this job still more hesitant to apply.[14]

While Trooper Justin reports that in a violent situation Alaska State Troopers will do their best to give direction over the telephone to the paraprofessionals, it may be as much as a week, depending on the weather, before State Troopers can arrive on the scene.

Although the state legislature recently permitted VPSOs to carry a firearm, very few have completed the training to do so. Justin reports that many individuals decline the right to carry a firearm, often because of the additional training and psychological examinations that individuals are required to undergo to do so. Furthermore, many VPSOs, VPOs, and TPOs are employed by local nonprofits, or village agencies, which often lack the resources to arm their employees. Justin further explained:

> It also depends upon the nonprofit organization [that pays and employs the VPSOs] – like [one nonprofit] signed onto it [allowing their VPSOs to carry firearms], but others, I think nine out of the twelve, didn't want to accept the liability of letting their guys carry.

[14] Chris Klint, "Man Troopers: Man Shoots Police Officer in Chevak, Then Kills Himself," *Alaska Dispatch News*, September 8, 2016; Rachel D'Oro, "Alaska Village Police Officer Shot by Suspected Alcohol Smuggler," *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*, July 26, 2013; Dave Bendinger, "VPSO Thomas Madole Killed in Manokotak." *KTOO Public Media*, March 20, 2013.

Liability certainly plays a part in the reluctance to arm peace officers. Liz Pederson, general counsel for the Association of Village Council Presidents explains that the VPSO model, in which a non-profit manages remote police forces, is unprecedented.[15] As a result, arming and training these forces is a work in progress.[16] However, Justin also noted that some VPSOs may not feel comfortable carrying a firearm in the line of duty for moral or philosophical reasons; he related a story of a VPSO who knew himself to be incapable of taking another human life and thus he declined to carry a firearm. Despite peace officers' limited training and education, ADA Ruth stressed that VPSOs, VPOs, and TPOs are great assets to their communities:

> They are the only police officers I've ever seen, walk into a situation completely unarmed, where a defendant has a gun, and is shooting off, and *take the gun away* … I had a guy in [a village], we had an active shooter there and he got on his bicycle and tried to follow him and stop him and ended up getting shot multiple times in the back. I mean, these guys, exhibit, incredible bravery.

However, Ruth further clarified that far more than bravery is required in law enforcement. Other skills, such as report writing, clarity, and follow-through are equally necessary for prosecution of cases in small, remote villages. She related that cases overseen by safety officers (as opposed to police officers) are:

> more difficult to prosecute, because, their reports aren't well written. They oftentimes don't have the means, because the village can't afford it, or because, they forget it, to get us proper discovery: photos, audio [of a crime scene].

In addition, she noted, safety officers tend to rotate in and out of the position as often as every week, returning when they need the money:

> So somebody will be a VPO one week, not the next, be a VPO the next week, not the next.

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[15] Lisa Demer, "As Alaska struggles to Fill VPSO Ranks, the Officers Remain Unarmed for Now," *Alaska Dispatch News,* February 11, 2017.
[16] Demer, "As Alaska Struggles," 2017.

This transience within the system hinders keeping each officer up to date on the procedures, requirements, and expectations of the job. Additionally, Ruth related, some of the safety officers have "very significant" criminal records, which may undermine their authority and credibility, should they be called upon to testify. Further, it is disconcerting to have "somebody who was a defendant one week … be your officer the next." Moreover, due to modest budgets, safety officers receive low salaries; thus few people are willing to take these positions.

Despite these limitations, the statistics for prosecution in rural communities look encouraging. Investigators further speculate that the higher prosecution rates may result from VPSOs' and VPOs' ability to secure witness and victim cooperation, which is highly correlated with cases being accepted for prosecution.[17] Further, local para-professionals can stand guard over the crime scene to ensure that no evidence is altered or destroyed, and that the perpetrator does not escape.

4.2.1.4 Lack of Mental Health Services

One of the most striking needs in this hub-community is mental health services for victims, perpetrators, and potential perpetrators of sexual and domestic violence crimes. While some mental health services are available, all of the professionals with whom I spoke agree that they are limited. Due to the remoteness of the region, and its great expanse, it is difficult to implement mental health or substance abuse services in any of the outlying villages. To receive mental health services, victims or perpetrators must relocate to the nearest hub-community with a psychologist or other licensed mental health counselor and remain there until their treatment is

[17] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 341.

completed. The likelihood of individuals undertaking this relocation is low, owing to a variety of personal, economic and logistical factors. ADA Ruth observed:

> People out here live by hunting, by fishing, money's not the same. And their only way to get treatment is to what? Fly into [a hub community], pay to stay at a hotel, pay to go through the treatment program -- with what money? You can't enforce it. But you also need them to get treatment, and, reconciling those things is incredibly difficult.

All of the professionals with whom I spoke emphasized that obtaining mental health treatment for victims is critical to the recovery of victims. Both the Assistant District Attorney and all the shelter employees, who worked with victims of sexual and domestic violence over long periods of time, highlighted the lack of mental health resources as a major impediment to victims' recovery. These professionals felt that without mental health services, victims and survivors would turn to other, potentially harmful alternatives to cope with the trauma they had experienced. Amber, the women's shelter employee, said that even individuals who live within a hub-community and can afford mental health services typically must wait three or four months for care, owing to low numbers of mental health professionals and the high attrition rate among professionals within the region. The lack of mental health resources in outlying areas increases the demand for services in the hub community, placing a strain on other resources as well. Amber explained:

> We have two clients in shelter right now who are waiting for in-patient treatment [for alcohol and drug abuse], and we're basically just trying to help them maintain until they get there.

Survivors turning to drugs or alcohol in the wake of a traumatic experience is not uncommon.[18] The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network reports that victims of sexual

[18] Lynne M. Cooper, Marcia Russell, and William H. George, "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse: A Test of Social Learning Formulations," *Journal of abnormal psychology* 97, no. 2 (1988): 218.

assault and domestic violence have many times higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and contemplation of suicide.[19] In "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse: A Test of Social Learning Formulations," Cooper, Russell and George write that individuals who have experienced these symptoms frequently use alcohol to lessen negative emotions, in the place of positive coping strategies.[20] Furthermore, they find that those who turn to alcohol or substance abuse as a coping mechanism are more likely to engage in heavier drinking and alcohol abuse.[21]

One 2008 study conducted by Patricia A. Resick, et al., found that of 150 women diagnosed with PTSD who engaged in cognitive behavioral therapy, "[all] participants improved, across conditions, not only on PTSD symptoms but also on depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, shame, and cognitive distortions."[22] Although this study looked at only 150 survivors, it clarifies that each participant had a long and complex trauma history, representative of what would be found in a clinical setting, and that the improvement of their symptoms reflects the positive effects of cognitive behavior therapy.[23] This said, the authors acknowledge that due to time constraints they conducted only one follow-up interview to assess participants' mental health, thus limiting the long-term conclusions of this study.[24] Yet, in my review of the literature I have found little evidence that mental health treatment mitigates these responses. While much of the literature suggests that early intervention is important in the recovery of victims of sexual

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[19] Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, "Effects of Sexual Violence," under "About Sexual Assault," https://rainn.org/.
[20] Cooper, Russell and George, "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse," 219.
[21] Cooper, Russell and George, "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse," 218.
[22] Patricia A. Resick et al., "A Randomized Clinical Trial to Dismantle Components of Cognitive Processing Therapy for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Female Victims of Interpersonal Violence," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 76, no. 2 (2008): 243.
[23] Resik, et al., "A Randomized Clinical Trial," 257.
[24] Resik, et al., "A Randomized Clinical Trial," 258.

and domestic violence, they suggest that the presence of strong familial networks and support is more critical.[25]

> Professionals nevertheless agreed that treatment programs for survivors of assault is crucial. They were more equivocal about programs for perpetrators. ADA Ruth observed:
> A treatment program for low level offenders [is beneficial]. For people who are just starting out on the wrong path to get reintegrated back in. I don't think it works as well for harder offenders, the people that are coming back and coming back and coming back, and . . . who at this point know me by name.

The literature on the topic supports this assessment. Indeed, the highest indicator for sexual assault recidivism is consistently reported as the number of prior victimizations the perpetrator committed.[26] Thus, early mental health intervention may be an important step towards preventing at-risk individuals from offending. Hanson and Bussier report that sexual offenders often show signs of low self-esteem, substance abuse problems, poor coping strategies, and negative emotional states as precursors to offending. While these symptoms do not always correlate with sexual deviancy, they are mental health issues that may be resolved with treatment prior to any offense occurring. Without access to mental health professionals, however, such treatment is not possible.

4.2.1.5 Lack of Services for Male Victims

Of the individuals impacted by the lack of public health services in Western Alaska, male victims comprise perhaps the most overlooked demographic. Sexual and domestic violence

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[25] John N. Briere, and Diana M. Elliott, "Immediate and Long-term Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse," *The Future of Children* (1994): 56-57; Dean G. Kilpatrick et al., "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse and Dependence: Data From a National Sample," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 68, no. 1 (2000): 11.
[26] Anthony Beech and Ann Scott Fordham, "Therapeutic Climate of Sexual Offender Treatment Programs," *Sexual Abuse* 9, no. 3 (1997): 233; Karl Hanson and Monique Bussiere, "Predicting Relapse: A Meta-analysis of Sexual Offender Recidivism Studies," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 66, no. 2 (1998): 352.
[26] Hanson and Bussiere, "Predicting Relapse," 352.

crimes are isolating and shame-inducing, leading to a high underreporting rates nationally. Victims of sexual assault often experience feelings of intense shame, which may increase during the discovery and reporting process, thus lessening victim reporting.[27] Michelle Davies notes in "Male Sexual Assault Victims: A Selective Review of the Literature and Implications for Support Services" that the barriers to reporting for men and boys, are even higher, due to social norms and expectations.[28] Reporting rates for sexual and domestic violence against young males are thought to be among the lowest worldwide, owing to the prevalence of such offenses and the heightened stigma that male victims' experience.[29] This stigma, Davies argues, results in male victims continuing to be traumatized, following the initial sexual assault, by others' negative responses, including belief in male rape myths such as such as ''men cannot be raped."[30]

Julie, the former head of the women's shelter, observed:

> As difficult as it is for women to come out and talk about sexual assault or sexual abuse . . . there's even more layers of barriers . . . for men and boys, because of the . . . societal norms that men should be . . . physically stronger . . . You get into issues around sexual identity . . . and then boys often feel nervous about coming forward and reporting sexual abuse . . . because of some of those judgements . . . So, because those [assaults] . . . result in even fewer reports, there are, even fewer services that are specifically designed to meet those needs.

Similarly, Paul, a mentor in the Engaging Young Men and Boys Program, who himself is a victim of child sexual abuse, explained:

> It's hard to get past some of the stereotype because the shame is put in there . . . and if something happens to a young man, it's kind of a double thing, because it's not supposed to happen to men, and if it did happen it

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[27] Candice Feiring, Lynn Taska, and Michael Lewis, "Adjustment Following Sexual Abuse Discovery: The Role of Shame and Attributional Style," *Developmental Psychology* 38, no.1 (2002): 79.
[28] Michelle Davies, "Male Sexual Assault Victims: A Selective Review of the Literature and Implications for Support Services," *Aggressive and Violent Behavior,* 7 (2000): 204-205.
[29] Gillian Mezey and Michael King, "The Effects of Sexual Assault on Men: A Survey of 22 Victims," *Psychological Medicine* 19, no. 1 (1989): 205.
[30] Davies, "The Effects of Sexual Assault on Men," 204.

> must be your [the victim's] fault … [society dictates that] 'men don't cry' and 'men don't get sexually abused.'

As Julie explained, with so few male victims stepping forward, it is difficult to establish services specifically designed to meet their needs. Young men who have been brought up in an environment where violence is "accepted and expected" may never be exposed to healthier ways of dealing with emotions without mental health resources.[31] When I asked each professional whether there were any programs available for abused young men and boys, their answers all amounted to "hardly any." While Amber stated that the women's shelter provided a few services for young men, they remain "one of the only organizations" in the region attempting to reach out to male victims. Prevention funding is one of the first things to be cut during times of financial stress, partly because it is so difficult to document a crime that does not take place; instead funding is targeted toward responding to violent crimes that have occurred. Amber, however, insisted that prevention efforts reduce crime. She said of outreach:

> It's working. We know it's working. It's just not working as fast as we'd like. And it's hard to put on paper how . . . and to save those funds.

Prevention is essential, given the correlation between having been a male victim of sexual assault and higher rates of substance abuse, depression, and suicidal thoughts.[32]

Paul spoke of the potential consequences of sexual abuse of males in graphic terms:

> If [men do get sexually abused], we're sure not gonna talk about it, so then we hold that inside of us until we either let it out in some other way, or maybe destructive way, or, maybe we decide that it's not worth it and go kill ourselves.

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[31] Pertice Moffitt and Heather Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence: Two Community Narratives," *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Community Research Alliance (*2016): 5.

[32] Nadia Garnefski, and Ellen Arends, "Sexual Abuse and Adolescent Maladjustment: Differences Between Male and Female Victims," *Journal of Adolescence* 21, no. 1 (1998): 99

And indeed, without resources to reach out to individuals at high risk for self-harm, such outcomes are not uncommon. Garnefski and Arends report that sexual abuse carries far more consequences for boys than girls including "use of alcohol, aggressive/criminal behavior, use of drugs . . . as well as regarding suicidal thoughts and behavior."[33] Further, the researchers state that sexually abused boys are 13 times more likely to attempt suicide than non-abused boys. Within the state of Alaska, the suicide rate is nearly twice the national average, and in the year 2014, men were over four times as likely to commit suicide as women.[34] However, Paul notes that the lack of evidence-based research on counseling programs for men in remote communities makes garnering funding for such programs virtually impossible.

Yet Trooper Justin insists that the lack of resources has not paralyzed first-responders in the region: "You make do with the resources and the personnel that you have available," and professionals continue to do their best.

4.2.1.6 Isolation

Most professionals with whom I spoke discussed the difficulty in providing services to the large number of communities under their oversight. Each professional office works with numerous surrounding villages, most of which are accessible only by airplane, boat, or snow machine. This creates immense logistical challenges for professionals, first to access the scene of a crime, and then to process the evidence. Furthermore, as noted previously, the geographic isolation of these communities creates a barrier to reporting for victims of sexual or violent

[33] Garnefski and Arends, "Sexual Abuse and Adolescent Maladjustment," 99.
[34] State of Alaska Department of Department of Health and Social Services: Division of Public Health, "Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics" under "Intentional Self-Harm (Suicide) Deaths," *Health Analytics and Vital Records Section (*Juneau, Alaska, 2016), 33.

crimes; when law enforcement is an airplane flight away, many victims may hesitate to put themselves in harms' way until authorities arrive on the scene. Trooper Justin explained:

> [This location is] a unique challenge … Your response time is kind of weather dependent, and, personnel dependent … Because you could have two or three different things going on. I could have an acute sexual assault that came in, yesterday … that I would plan on going out to today, and then weather would be bad, or I would walk in in the morning we would have a guy, running around with a gun somewhere, and we would have to break and go do that, and come back to this.

In rural Alaska, airplanes frequently cannot fly, sometimes for days at a time, due to poor weather conditions. Consequently, the victim of a crime may have to wait for help until a Trooper has the time and the weather conditions permit. Sociologist Judy Shepherd explained in "Where Do You Go When It's Forty Below?" that if a woman in a rural Alaskan community wishes to escape a dangerous situation, she must telephone the troopers, hide out until they arrive, and then "hurry to the plane with her children in tow."[35]

Similarly, the shelter employee with whom I spoke related:

> People will be hiding under houses trying to find a safe place to stay until the Troopers can get there the next day. [A Trooper] has a story where he was … on call and was on the phone from like 11 p.m. till 8 a.m. the next day, with a lady who was hiding out under her house, just to make sure she was still alive. Like, he just stayed with her all night, because she was legitimately hiding under her house, the guy was looking around town trying to find her, trying to kill her, and Troopers couldn't get there until the next day. So they . . . just told her to hide out. 'Go where ever you can, take a blanket, hide out under the house, don't let him find you.'

Due to the isolation of remote rural communities, victims of violent crimes may have no safe place to escape to within the community. As a result, victims may hesitate to report a crime of this nature for fear of provoking their abusers. Moffitt and Fikowski, as well as Judy

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[35] Judy Shepherd, "Where Do You Go When It's 40 Below? Domestic Violence Among Rural Alaska Native Women,"*Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 16, no. 4 (2001): 497.

Shepherd, also note the tendency of community members to protect the abuser over the victim of the crime in rural northern villages, which further isolates victims.[36] Sharon, a former legal advocate and the founder of an Alaskan women's shelter several decades ago, explains that crimes of sexual and domestic violence isolate victims at multiple levels:

> My heart goes out to the villages because . . . where you gonna go? These are crimes of isolation . . . if you're sexually assaulted, likely you've been, coerced, or bullied . . . into, a place where you couldn't escape . . . In a home that tolerates domestic violence it's a closed system. How the hell are you gonna get out? You don't have any money in your pocket. I [the perpetrator] took your ID. You know, I locked the back door. What are you gonna do about it? Besides I control how you feel about yourself.

Isolation, then, is multi-layered and complex, and stems not only from victim's physical distance from services and law enforcement, but from social isolation imposed by the perpetrator and sometimes other community members. Sharon especially stresses the monetary and emotional dependence that victims of domestic violence often experience. The "closed system" she identifies refers to the feeling of entrapment that surrounds many women in violent relationships. In abusive relationships, whether sexual or domestic, perpetrators may manipulate or forcefully cut their victim off from the outside world. This reinforces the emotional and physical isolation from the outside world, leading women to stay because they feel they have no way out. In accordance with these observations, a University of Nevada publication characterizes domestic violence as acts of "violence, power and coercion intended to control another person's behavior."[37]

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[36] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 5; Shepherd, "Where Do You Go," 497.

[37] Pamela Powell and Marilyn Smith, *Domestic Violence: An Overview* (University of Nevada, Reno: University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet-11-76, 2011) 1, http://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/cy/2011/fs1176.pdf.

Sharon related that one of the most meaningful tasks the women's shelter preforms is to "give women a place to come, where they would realize that they weren't the only unlucky one, or the only abused one." Furthermore, by connecting with the police department, the district attorney's office, and other professional offices concerning sexual and domestic violence, her shelter makes such abuse public, reducing the isolation that has cloaked victims of violence. In rural Alaska, where few women's shelters, police departments, or district attorneys exist, many people live in extreme physical and emotional isolation.

Moreover, dependence upon perpetrators can leave victims feeling shame for their present circumstances, and lead them to hesitate to speak out, especially in small rural communities, where anonymity may not be guaranteed. ADA Ruth spoke to this:

> When you get to the *way* [more remote villages] . . . They're *real* small . . . And we see a *ton* of cases from out there. And, when you talk about these places that are smaller, your disclosure might be to that person's [the abuser's] husband or wife . . . or it might be to one of your family members that you don't really want to know this quite yet. So it's tougher because everyone is *so interconnected* . . . that it makes those disclosures . . . more difficult than talking to someone that is outside of the scenario and impartial.

Moffitt and Fikowski also note that front-line workers in remote northern villages are often local residents trained for permanent employment, which may deter reporting of abuse, owing to family ties within the community.[38] The researchers refer to a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer who explained: "I don't think a community . . . [that small] can have a . . . local worker, because there's a trust issue. There's a [small number] of families in the community. One's not going to trust one of another family. It doesn't work."[39] On the other hand, such isolation can

[38] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 22.
[39] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 22.

contribute to distrust of authorities, organizations and individuals from outside the community, as discussed in Chapter 1.[40]

4.3 Cyclicality

As with my interviews with survivors, a common theme that I encountered in my interviews with professionals was the cyclicality of sexual and domestic violence. Almost every professional I interviewed referenced the cycle of violence, and it presented itself in many ways. The most common cycles professionals referenced were victims returning to violent relationships and victims becoming perpetrators.

4.3.1 Victim Cyclicality

Several of my respondents spoke at length of witnessing victims of abuse becoming victims in other abusive situations in the future. This trend is well-documented in the literature, as well. Amber, the women's shelter employee, told me:

> Even if [women in the shelter are] not going back to the same abuser . . . [they're] – consistently seeking out people who treat [them] poorly. But it all boils back to the trauma . . . that causes people to lose that self-esteem, to lose the ability to have confidence in oneself, to know that you deserve better.

The study "Sexual Assault Experiences in Adulthood and Prior Victimization Experiences," by Gidycz, Coble, Latham, and Layman, in which researchers surveyed 927 women over a nine-week period, also suggests that a history of sexual victimization is a risk factor for subsequent victimization.[41] More specifically, however, the majority of the literature identifies a history of

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[40] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 22; Shepherd, "Where Do You Go," 503.

[41] Christine A, Gidycz et al., "Sexual Assault Experience in Adulthood and Prior Victimization Experiences," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (1993): 154, 164.

childhood sexual assault, rather than adult victimization, as the greatest risk factor for future abuse.[42] In "Does Childhood Sexual Assault Set in Motion a Cycle of Violence Against Women?" Jennie Noll argues that a persistent cycle of violence perpetrated against women may begin in childhood in the form of sexual abuse.[43] This abuse can then manifest itself in a number of ways, including the inability to manage distressing memories and emotions, which is in turn linked to higher rates substance abuse.[44] Gidycz, Coble, Latham and Layman quote a 1989 Koss and Dinero study that found that women who were sexually abused in childhood were 2.4 times more likely to be re-victimized as adults.[45] The relationship between childhood trauma and subsequent substance abuse and victimization is critical to understanding the cyclicality of these phenomena, especially considering that Alaska's rate of childhood victimization is six times the national average.[46]

Despite their understanding of multiple forms of cyclicality, professionals working in the field of sexual and domestic violence sometimes find it difficult to remember that the seemingly conscious decision to return to an abusive situation is often linked to previous traumas. Victims of repeated assaults often cope with past traumas in unhealthy ways, which can complicate providing adequate services for them. Amber explained:

> Everybody thinks of DV [domestic violence] shelters as this place where really innocent . . . housewives escape for the first time, and the last time . . . That is not the norm . . . There's been a trend . . . in shelters . . . where it's moving from that traditional DV victim, to folks who are experiencing . . . different traumas, numerous traumas, mental health issues, [substance abuse], getting caught up in the law themselves, so it's no longer 'this is my problem, my problem is DV, and now I'm . . . away

[42] Jennie G. Noll, "Does Childhood Sexual Abuse Set in Motion a Cycle of Violence Against Women? What We Know and What We Need to Learn," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20, no. 4 (2005): 456.
[43] Noll, "Does Childhood Sexual Abuse," 2.
[44] Antonia Abbey et al., "Sexual Assault and Alcohol Consumption: What Do We Know About Their Relationship and What Types of Research are Still Needed?" *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 9, no. 3 (2004): 272.
[45] Gidycz et al., "Sexual assault experience in adulthood," 152.
[46] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.

> forever, and I'm moving on,' and it's more of repeat clients . . . Just kind of cycling in and out, going back, either to their abuser, or to a new abuser . . . and then cycling back through here.

While the shelter is prepared to help victims move on by providing legal support and housing, it is not currently prepared to provide mental or drug abuse services to their clientele. This can make accepting all women seeking safety difficult, and potentially traumatizing for other women staying in the shelter. Amber explained:

> how do we provide for the safety of everyone else in shelter, if [for example] . . . one person's safety is maintaining with alcohol, and another person's safety is being in a sober environment, how do we have them all living in the same place?

As noted above, survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse frequently turn to alcohol or other substances as a coping mechanism to overcome traumatic experiences.[47] In "Immediate and Long Term Impacts of Childhood Sexual Abuse," John Briere and Diana M. Elliot suggest that a "significant portion" of those currently addicted to substances may be attempting to self-medicate abuse-related depression, anxiety or posttraumatic stress disorder.[48] While the women's shelter with which I had contact provides housing, legal support, and assistance in finding employment, few substance abuse programs are available within this hub community due to a lack of trained professionals. This leaves the shelter employees to help their cliental as best as they can. As survivors turn to substance abuse, the likelihood of their being victimized in the future increases; indeed, approximately one half of women who have been sexually assaulted were drinking alcohol at the time.[49]

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[47] Cooper, Russell and George, "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse," 218.
[48] Briere and Elliot, "Immediate and Long-term Impacts," 60.
[49] Abbey et al., "Sexual Assault and Alcohol Consumption," 272.

4.3.2 Perpetrator Cyclicality

Some of my professional respondents stated that they believed that the perpetration of sexual and domestic violence may be cyclical in nature. They suggested that victims of sexual assault are statistically more likely to perpetrate sexual assault, while victims and witnesses of domestic violence are more likely to engage in violent relationships in the future. While not all children who have been victims of sexual violence become perpetrators, they are statistically more likely to do so than children who were not abused. Nationally 30 percent of victims of sexual assault later commit the same crime.[50] Similarly, Holt, Buckley, and Whelana found that violence can be inter-generationally transmitted, and that young adults who had been exposed to parental violence as children were nearly three times more likely than others to experience violence in their own adult relationships.[51] ADA Ruth also spoke of cyclicality in domestic violence regarding perpetrators:

> It's such an intergenerational cycle. When you're a kid who's grown up seeing mom beat dad, or dad beat mom . . . that's what you think a normal adult relationship looks like. You model your adult relationships off of the adult relationships you grew up watching as a kid because that's what you know. And so when you get mad, just taking a swing seems like the normal thing to do because that's what you've seen happen.

The impacts of growing up in a violent household are well documented in the literature. In their publication "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse and Dependence: Data From a National Sample," Dean Kilpatrick, et al. stress the long-term negative impacts of adverse

[50] M.I. Glasser et al., "Cycle of Child Sexual Abuse: Links Between Being a Victim and Becoming a Perpetrator," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 179, no. 6 (2001): 488. http://bjp.rcpsych.org/content/179/6/482

[51] Stephanie Holt, Helen Buckley, Sadhbh Whelana, "The Impact of Exposure to Domestic Violence on Children and Young People: A Review of the Literature," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 32 (2008): 806.

childhood events on individuals.[52] They interviewed 4,023 adolescents aged twelve to seventeen to identify risk factors for substance abuse in adolescents, and found that witnessing violence was "among the most powerful risk factors for substance use disorders," tripling the risk of substance abuse and dependence.[53] In another large study, Whitfield et al., found similar results. They distributed Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) questionnaires to 8,629 individuals over the course of a four-year study.[54] They found that male respondents who witnessed or were victims of childhood physical abuse were twice as likely to become perpetrators of interpersonal violence in the future. Their research suggests that "as the number of violent experiences increases, the risks of . . . perpetration by men also increase by about 60% to 70%." Whitfield et al. note that their findings are consistent with other studies done nationally. This cyclicality applies to childhood sexual abuse as well.

While it is more complicated to identify a correlation between having been a victim of childhood sexual assault and becoming a perpetrator of childhood sexual assault, much literature suggests a connection. Over the past two decades a multitude of studies have been conducted examining the link, with results showing anywhere between 17 to 72 percent of perpetrators of sexual abuse were once victims of sexual abuse.[55] In their study on violence perpetrated by adolescents, Naomi N. Duke, Sandra L. Pettingell, Barbara J. McMorris and Iris W. Borowsky report that the sexual abuse of boys has been associated with greater risks of substance abuse, suicide attempts, and male sexual aggression.[56]

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[52] Kilpatrick et al., "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse," 12.
[53] Kilpatrick et al., "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse," 11-12.
[54] Charles L. Whitfield et al., "Violent Childhood Experiences and the Risk of Intimate Partner Violence in Adults: Assessment in a Large Health Maintenance Organization," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 18, no. 2 (2003): 171.
[55] Daniel T. Wilcox, Fiona Richards, Zerine O'Keeffe, "Resilience and Risk Factors Associated with Experiencing Childhood Sexual Abuse," *Childhood Abuse Review* 13 (2004): 340.
[56] Naomi N. Duke et al., "Adolescent Violence Perpetration: Associations with Multiple Types of Adverse Childhood Experiences," *American Academy of Pediatrics* (2010). DOI: 10.1542/peds.2009-0597.

My respondent Paul, who is not only a survivor of childhood sexual assault, but also has worked with young men and boys for many years to prevent violence, discussed the ways in which such multigenerational abuse can occur. He believes that belief systems are formed early in life and can be difficult to change. In the case of multigenerational abuse, those belief systems may center around power and control. He explained:

> [For victims of childhood sexual abuse] all of the power that you may have had is taken away from you … but then if you project it on somebody else it's like, you have a feeling you have some power over somebody that's weaker.

Paul observed that if sexual abuse continues long enough, it can come to be seen normal within a family or community. He contends that the normalization of these acts may lead to their continuance, as perpetrators fail to be reported to authorities and thus are free to continue violent acts. Furthermore, when such traumatizing events are considered normal, young people who have been the victims of these crimes are not provided the tools to cope with these confusing and violating conditions. Paul believes that much of the anger he sees in young men who were sexually or domestically abused derives from the shame they feel for having those crimes perpetrated against them.

Candice Feiring, Lynn Taska, Michael Lewis's article on victims' responses to childhood sexual abuse relates how victims of childhood sexual assault often experience the feeling of intense shame.[57] The authors define shame as a state in which the whole self feels defective as a result of a perceived failure to meet self-imposed standards.[58] As noted above, male victims of sexual assault often feel greater shame than female victims, owing to greater stigmatization of

[57] Feiring, Taska, Lewis, "Adjustment Following Sexual Abuse," 79.
[58] Feiring, Taska, Lewis. "Adjustment Following Sexual Abuse," 79.

male sexual assault, and this shame inhibits males from reporting. [59] Paul explained that he feels that part of his job as a mentor for young men is to show them healthy ways of dealing with their anger, rather than continuing the cycle of abuse.

Ruth related a similar observation concerning the cyclicality of abuse:

> It's very common at a sex assault sentencing … [for a male] defendant . . . to say, "I faced abuse as a child." And . . . you see, people who are abused as children, whether sexually or . . . domestic violence, grow up to commit that same *type* of abuse. So, children who are molested, sometimes grow up to be molesters. That is not to say that . . . it's inevitable. But you see a correlation.

Ruth related that prosecuting male perpetrators who were once victims of sexual assault themselves raises moral concerns:

> On the one hand you want to have sympathy for this person who has been abused . . . And on the other hand you say, 'I am sorry that you were abused as a kid but - I've gotta stop the cycle somewhere.'

It is important here to note that studies indicate that fewer than half of victims become perpetrators of sexual assault. Nevertheless, most professionals I spoke with referenced victim-perpetrator cyclicality, and the difficulties they face in bringing both justice and mental health services to these individuals.

4.4 Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Several professionals identified alcohol and substance abuse as one of the most common social problems correlated with domestic and sexual violence. While causation is difficult to pinpoint, much of the published research, as well as my original research, concludes that the

[59] Davies, "The Effects of Sexual Assault on Men," 205.

pervasiveness of alcohol abuse contributes to the high rates of both sexual and domestic violence within rural Alaskan communities. Ruth had this to say:

> As far as my [sexual and domestic violence] assignments, it is rare – we definitely have them, but it's rare – to see a case where both parties are sober, or where even one part is sober. A lot of it has to do with alcohol. It's not an excuse at all. It can be somewhat of an explanation sometimes.

This high correlation between alcohol consumption and sexual and domestic violence has a variety of implications. Ruth explained that alcohol abuse may be used by perpetrators in sexual and domestic violence to defame the victim of the crime. In domestic violence cases this may present itself as "we were drinking and talking about the past," and the situation got out of hand. In sexual assault cases however, she reports that alcohol abuse on the part of the victim is frequently cited by the perpetrator as an excuse for rape. She calls this the "consent defense," in which a perpetrator tries to demonstrate that the victim consented to sexual intercourse and is now lying. Ruth explained:

> [Part of the] consent defense is, 'she was so drunk' . . . Because . . . either 'she was so drunk she doesn't know what she was talking about,' . . . or, 'how was I to know that she was too drunk not to consent?'

This defense is frequently used owing to its effectiveness. Despite its pervasiveness, substance abuse carries a strong social stigma for women, or any victim, frequently leading to the defamation and shaming of an intoxicated victim. Ruth pointed out that the social stigma surrounding violent crimes in which the victim was intoxicated discourages victims from reporting. As reported in my literature review, researchers Moffitt and Fikowski found that in the remote northern Canadian communities they studied, residents tended to excuse the violent behavior of inebriated males, while simultaneously condemning their female victims who

consumed alcohol.[60] The authors related that in their focus groups, participants disclosed that men frequently raped or took advantage of unconscious women. ""There is no demonstrated understanding that . . . sexual acts require consent between two people," the authors wrote.[61] In fact, some community members suggested that drinking to the point of unconsciousness essentially invited rape. This normalization and shaming discourages victims from reporting such crimes, which allows the criminal behavior to continue. In this vein, Ruth told me:

> Getting on the stand and testifying, it's tough because, there always is sort of . . . shame of 'you were so intoxicated that you were passed out drunk.'

The anticipation of such public shaming discourages victims, who have experienced the intense humiliation of a sexual assault, from reporting the crimes. When victims understand that reporting their perpetrator may lead to their being subjected in an open trial of their peers to condemnation for their intoxication, victims understandably may choose not to come forward. Ruth noted that her job as prosecutor is to demonstrate "beyond a reasonable doubt," that the victim did not consent to sexual interactions with the perpetrator. This is particularly difficult if the victim was intoxicated to the point of unconsciousness and may not recall the events leading up to the assault. In such cases, the defense attorney may try to show that the victim is a liar, sexually promiscuous, or morally impoverished. ADA Ruth said that it is especially difficult for victims to testify in these cases:

> You've got someone trying to point out how awful you are, how bad you are. It is a *traumatizing* experience for a victim to go through.

[60] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 19.
[61] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 19.

Amber, the shelter employee, discussed the complex relationship between trauma, alcohol abuse, sexual assault, and the stigma that surrounds such inter-related phenomena:

> We see that kind of thinking even on our staff. It's really difficult to, kind of push that thinking out of people's minds. It's what they've grown up with: alcohol is the devil, alcohol causes lots of issues. We have a handful of clients [victims] I can think of in particular who are alcoholics . . . They're in with a negative crowd. They go back to all of the houses that everyone knows to avoid, and they're routinely abused, they're routinely sexually assaulted, and they're routinely cycling in and out of here. And it's really easy to want to say 'just stop drinking. You're putting yourself in this situation' . . . But that's not, what's happening.

Instead, she believes, the lack of mental health services for victims of trauma increases the likelihood of their using substances to cope with the trauma, which perpetuates the cycle of substance abuse, violence and repeated victimization. Survivors frequently turn to drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism to overcome traumatic experiences.[62] Wingood, DiClemente, and Raj conducted a study of 203 women from rural areas of Alabama in domestic violence shelters and found that women experiencing both sexual and domestic violence were twice as likely to feel depressed, and 1.8 times more likely to have attempted suicide. Because of such negative and harmful emotional states, victims of these crimes are 2.8 times as likely to use marijuana to cope with their abuse.[63] Furthermore, Cooper, Russell and George found that those who turn to alcohol or substance abuse as a coping mechanism are more likely to engage in heavier drinking and drug abuse. These individuals use alcohol and other substances to escape the emotional turmoil brought about by the abuse they have suffered.[64] Yet when alcohol abuse is seen as the

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[62] Cooper, Russell and George, "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse," 218.
[63] Gina M. Wingood, Ralph J DiClemente, and Anita Raj, "Adverse Consequences of Intimate Partner Abuse Among Women in Non-Urban Domestic Violence Shelters," *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 19, no. 4 (2000): 270, 274.
[64] Cooper, Russell and George, "Coping, Expectancies, and Alcohol Abuse," 218.

primary problem rather than as a symptom of the problem, the actual issue becomes obfuscated. Thus, the published literature and my original research provide overwhelming evidence that alcohol and substance abuse contribute to the complex web of circumstances surrounding sexual and domestic violence in rural Alaska and elsewhere. However, to assert that alcohol abuse *causes* such violence would grossly distort and oversimplify the problem.

4.5 State Systems in Rural Communities

One of the most common frustrations I heard among the professionals I interviewed stemmed from the inadequacies of the state and federal legal systems as they apply to rural communities. While the logistical challenges discussed above hinder effective responses to sexual and domestic violence, professionals cited rural Alaskan communities' general distrust of the legal system as a more fundamental obstruction to reducing these problems. Several participants suggested that this distrust stems from the differing views that rural residents hold concerning how to treat criminal offenders. ADA Ruth spoke of the difficulty in prosecuting offenders:

> I think the juries out here [are our biggest challenge]. They do not like to convict . . . And so, the problem is getting justice for victims, and justice looks differently to different people. There are some community members who say 'no, jail is never what we really wanna see' . . . [But], I work for the State of Alaska, and the State's view of justice is, certainly rehabilitative programs, certainly, sex offender treatment, certainly, substance abuse treatment management . . . But it also includes jail . . . [But], how do you get justice for someone when you . . . [don't know] what a jury's gonna do. So it causes us to have to plead things lower than we'd like to.

Ruth contends that rural community members' distrust of the State of Alaska's legal system leaves perpetrators of the most heinous crimes free to repeat offend. She recognizes that the legal system's emphasis on incarceration inhibits convictions, but she posed she question:

> What about the other people in the community, don't they deserve to be protected from this offender?

On the other hand, Ruth acknowledged that the legal system does virtually nothing to resolve the underlying problems that contribute to sexual and domestic violence. Without funding for treatment programs for sexual offenders, the cycle of violence may continue in remote communities.

Similarly, Trooper Justin spoke of the family ties and small rural community politics that inhibit convictions. Not only are victims and perpetrators often related, but perpetrators or their family members may be individuals with political influence.

> There's some frustrations; you know, you got a village council that wants you to do what *they* want you to do, but not what you're earmarked to do. You know, 'you can arrest that person but you can't arrest this person because they're a city councilman.' [But] that's not how it works.

Here Trooper Justin referred to tribal councils, which have the power to make various community decisions. These councils hold political power within their communities, but the State of Alaska maintains jurisdiction over crimes, and state law does not specify differential treatment for prominent persons or their family members who commit crimes. Clearly people with financial and political capital enjoy many advantages in the state legal system. Nevertheless, the distrust of the state legal system coupled with the tendency of rural community members to overlook sexual and domestic violence crimes by prominent individuals and their family members frustrates law enforcement and criminal justice professionals. Both ADA Ruth

and Trooper Justin discussed the complexities of working with Tribal Police Officers (TPOs) and Village Police Officers (VPOs), many of whom are employed by tribal governments or by Native non-profit organizations.[65] These non-government agencies sometimes harbor reservations concerning the state justice system, leading management to pressure the safety officers they employ not to comply with state legal standards. ADA Ruth spoke of Tribal Police Officers being pressured by the local Tribal Council on who "can and what cannot be arrested or reported." She related a conversation she had recently had with a Tribal Police Officer in which he hesitated to arrest an individual whom the local Tribal Council did not want to "get in trouble." When she pushed him to make the arrest, he stated that to do so without the Tribal Council's consent would get him fired. Such dynamics are pervasive in rural communities nationwide. Susan Lewis, who studied the peculiarities of rural communities across the United States, found that "rural people tend to be suspicious of strangers."[66] This suspicion may result in disdain for outside regulations and agencies, with rural community members and police forces preferring to deal with problems in a more private way.

Julie, the former head of a rural Alaska women's shelter explains why she believes that this distrust of State legal systems exists within rural communities:

> I think the system of having systems administered from elsewhere where they drop in a day, or two days, or three days and, and do *something* - you know . . . whether that's an arrest, or children have to be removed or whatever, and then they leave again . . . it doesn't work well for communities . . . A lot of times the community is left not knowing the whole story, not knowing exactly what happened, not knowing the "whys," left to make sort of their own assumptions and . . . it leaves a really bad sort of feeling often for people … So, absolutely the Trooper model… the "fly-in-and-fly-away-model" it's – it's flawed.

[65] Alaska Department of Public Safety, "Village Public Safety Officers."
[66] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 5.

Julie explains further that State authorities, including Alaska State Troopers and the Office of Child Services, are legally obligated not to disclose the facts of a case to others in the community. Thus, when a family or community member is suddenly removed from the village with no explanation, residents are left reeling. The remoteness of many Alaska communities oftentimes prohibits family members from following the court proceedings, so they never hear the testimony against the accused, and therefore never learn the circumstances surrounding the alleged crime or evidence presented in court. If a well-respected member of the community is taken to court with no explanation or outreach to the community, residents may assume incompetence or worse on the part of authorities. Without outreach and community involvement, distrust can mount and compound with each incident.

ADA Ruth relates that because of community distrust of state agencies, individuals sometimes decide, mid-way through an investigation, to cease cooperating with the authorities. This puts authorities in a difficult position, in which they must decide whether to continue the case without the support of the victim. She described the conundrum:

> Do you want to be the next person who forces this person to do something that they didn't want to do to begin with? [By] taking the place of the offender in doing something without this person's consent?

Julie points out that in small communities, families may value community cohesion even above safety or justice for the victim. This norm is prevalent in rural communities nationwide, as reported by Susan Lewis.[67] Julie elaborated:

> People (victims) are absolutely hesitant to engage a system in reporting a crime like sexual assault … They are resented for perhaps making a report that results in the removal of a community member from the community, and our communities being so small, there are profound ripple effects that are not absorbed in a bigger community where there's anonymity. And

[67] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 5.

> facing people in . . . [the community] after reporting a crime that has had these ripple effects, it's really difficult for victims.

The tendency for rural community members to condemn victims who speak out in the wake of a sexual assault is well documented. Lewis argues that attitudes towards sexual assault in rural communities nationwide may appear relatively accepting to outside observers.[68] However, she clarifies that in all communities regardless of rurality, communities and families define norms. Rural communities often have limited exposure to broad social norms that challenge the beliefs of the community. As a result, Lewis reports "although a victim feels discomfort, fear or dread, the family may influence her attitudes to accept a situation as the reality or 'just the way it is'" in order to preserve the status quo and avoid making waves within the community."[69] Researchers Moffit and Fikowski found in the northern rural Canadian communities they studied, women are shamed and blamed for disrupting community harmony if they speak out against an abusive partner.[70] Judy Shepherd wrote of similar norms in the rural Alaska region in which she studied, quoting a resident who said: "there's a norm against causing trouble. People say you're a troublemaker when you put someone in jail."[71] To avoid the negative community repercussions of reporting sexual or domestic abuse, many women remain silent.

Moreover, many state systems are not adequately prepared to respond to and assist victims of sexual assault. The White House Council on Women and Girls states that some police officers "believe certain rape myths (e.g., that many women falsely claim rape to get attention). Similarly, if victims do not behave in the way some police officers expect (e.g. crying) an officer

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[68] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 5.
[69] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 5.
[70] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 7.
[71] Shepherd, "Where Do You Go," 505.

may believe she is making a false report – when, in reality, only 2-10% of reported rapes are false."[72] Julie understands why victims of sexual and domestic assault hesitate to come forward, given the potential for negative responses, as she states:

> I think even the data would suggest that victims must weigh whether or not it's worth it. And obviously, you know, I support people in coming forward, in speaking out, in keeping communities safe by having interventions for offenders, and accountability for offenders . . . but knowing the data, and knowing the repercussions, I also clearly understand why some people make the choice to not report.

In recent years, state and federal systems have made a concerted effort to ensure that victims of sexual assault receive the best possible care. The 2014 report by the White House Council on Women and Girls states that since the implementation of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994, annual rates of domestic violence have dropped by as much as 64% nationwide.[73] The VAWA provides funding for the training of specialized sexual assault response teams (SARTs). These teams of medical, legal, mental health and law enforcement professionals are trained to respond professionally and compassionately to victims of sexual assault, and to lessen the trauma of reporting to authorities and engaging with medical personnel following a sexual assault.[74] In VAWA-funded specialized units, sexual assault conviction rates average 60-80 percent, a great improvement over the average in non-specialized units of approximately a 30 percent conviction rate for perpetrators of sexual crimes.[75]

A recently released report by the University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center suggests a significant reduction in sexual assault and domestic violence between the years of 2010 and

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[72] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action*, Washington, DC: White House Council on Women and Girls, Office of the Vice President, January 2014, 16: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/sexual_assault_report_1-21-14.pdf
[73] White House Council, on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 20.
[74] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault,* 2014, 20.
[75] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault*, 2014, 17.

2015 in Alaska.[76] This survey asked 3,027 women in Alaska about their experiences with domestic violence and sexual assault. Responses suggest that domestic violence rates had fallen by 32 percent, and sexual assault had been reduced by 33 percent. However, the Justice Center notes that limitations of this survey include that only English-speakers with phone access, over the age of 18, and with a home residence were surveyed. Many women who have been victimized do not have access to those amenities. Furthermore, the Justice Center cautions readers "this survey measured the number of victims, not the number of victimizations."[77] A more recent 2016 study showed a 14 percent increase in the number of reported incidents of felony level sexual assault between the years 2015 and 2016.[78] However, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) advises caution when comparing their results with the Justice Center's Alaska Victimization Survey, explaining that the two studies used different data collection methodologies in amassing incidents of felony assaults. The DPS utilized the Federal Sex Offense database to total the number of victimizations reported to the authorities, regardless of age, which differs from the Justice Center's statewide survey that interviewed only individuals over the age of 18.[79] However, DPS cautions that this report may show an increase in reporting of felony level sexual offenses, rather than an increase in the crimes themselves, and that the drop in sexual offenses shown by the Alaska Victimization Survey may still be accurate.[80]

Julie believes that as conversations about sexual and domestic violence become more common in society at large, we are providing better services for victims and survivors of assault.

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[76] "Alaska Victimization Survey," 2016.
[77] "Alaska Victimization Survey," 2016.
[78] [78] U.S. Department of Public Safety: "Crime in Alaska Supplemental Report: 2016 Felony Level Sexual Offences," under "Incidents and Rates by Region," Christen Spears and Kathryn Monfreda (Anchorage, Alaska: October 26, 2016), 5, https://dps.alaska.gov/getmedia/0637d6db-11f0-4d61-88a9-2d94a8e48547/2016-felony-level-sex-offenses-final-locked;.aspx.
[79] "Felony Level Sexual Offenses," 2016, 5.
[80] "Felony Level Sexual Offenses," 2016, 6.

> [Alaska is] relatively young state, I think there've been a lot of things that have happened [concerning] domestic violence or sexual assault, to kind of reach a crisis point in our state . . . So first it was . . . figuring out systems, getting laws into place, and then comes these conversations around, how do we do a better job.' [And], 'what's causing these issues to, perpetuate themselves?'

She elaborated:

> As you have those conversations, you start to delve into, from sort of an organizational or systems perspective, those bigger topics, in the framework around historical trauma, the role of tribes and Alaska Native communities and responding in a way that is most appropriate for their needs. [And] understanding that victims of domestic violence or sexual assault often have complex trauma histories [that] affect how they choose to participate or not participate in a systems response . . . the more we uncover about how layered and inter-related all of these different subjects are (the more effectively we can respond).

4.6 Conclusion

The issues surrounding sexual and domestic violence are indeed complex and multifaceted. Each contributing factor touches upon and compounds another. Together these complex conditions and problems explain the difficulty in breaking the cycle of violence and ending these crimes.

The professionals with whom I spoke highlighted the conditions they believed contribute to such high rates of sexual and domestic violence in Alaska, and the challenges they face during their work. The themes that emerged from my analysis of the interviews included isolation, substance and alcohol abuse, negative community responses, cyclicality, and understaffing and funding. The professionals who spoke to me were eager to share their experiences aiding survivors of such violence, and their thoughts on causes and remedies. It is important to note here, however, that these perspectives do not necessarily apply to rural communities as a whole.

Nevertheless, these individuals' professional experience gives them valuable insight into the circumstances in rural communities that contribute to their high rates of sexual and domestic violence. I hope that portraying their views will contribute to solutions to this pervasive violence.

In the following chapter I will address the both survivors and professionals' ideas of how best to aide survivors in remote Alaskan communities.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Sexual and domestic violence crimes are strikingly common across the state of Alaska; its sexual assault rate is nearly three times the national average, with the child sexual assault rates six times the national average.[1] This violence is compounded in rural communities, with the Department of Public Safety reporting that western Alaska has nearly twice the level of felony level of sexual offense per capita of any other region with a correspondingly low population rate.[2]

To allow survivors of sexual and domestic violence, who often feel silenced by community norms, tell their stories, I traveled to two remote communities in western Alaska and conducted oral history interviews. Through audio recorded discussions, I spoke with survivors, elders and professionals in the field of sexual assault and domestic violence. I have sought to answer the following three questions:

1. What do survivors want others to know about how this experience has affected them?
2. What are the differences and similarities between how survivors, elders, and professionals view the issues of sexual assault and domestic violence in small, remote communities?

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[1] " *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.

[2] U.S. Department of Public Safety: "Crime in Alaska Supplemental Report: 2016 Felony Level Sexual Offences," under "Incidents and Rates by Region," Christen Spears and Kathryn Monfreda, (Anchorage, Alaska: October 26, 2016), 5, https://dps.alaska.gov/getmedia/0637d6db-11f0-4d61-88a9-2d94a8e48547/2016-felony-level-sex-offenses-final-locked;.aspx.

3. How do survivors, elders and professions compare and differ on topics concerning intervention strategies, help strategies, and the circumstances that have contributed to such high rates of these crimes in rural Alaska?

I interviewed five female survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence, one male survivor of childhood sexual assault, and eight professionals who worked in a variety of fields. Because of the personal nature of my interviews, I have done everything in my power to protect the identity of my survivor respondents, and to remove any identifying information about them and their families. To protect the anonymity of these survivors, for both their safety and privacy, I have also chosen not to reveal the names, offices, or locations of the professionals whom I interviewed. For the sake of clarity, however, I have assigned each professional with a pseudonym (Table 1).

Assistant District Attorney (ADA) Ruth	Assistant District Attorney; specializes in sexual assault cases
State Trooper Justin	Alaska State Trooper; member of the Violent Offender's Unit
Amber	Women's shelter employee; in charge of relocating women to safety
Paul	Mentor in the Engaging Young Men and Boys Program
Julie	Former head of a rural Alaskan women's shelter
Sharon	Co-founder of an Alaskan women's shelter; former shelter legal advocate

Table 1: Professionals

As I analyzed my interviews with both professionals and survivors, a number of common themes emerged, despite the diversity of individuals I interviewed. Each theme connected to others, forming a chain of interrelated and overlapping social pathologies in which one pathology may lead to, or exacerbate another. Many of the problems discussed were cyclical in

nature; from the acts of sexual assault and domestic violence themselves, to offshoot pathologies such as alcohol and drug abuse; it is rare that these problems either arise or dissipate in isolation. External influences compound these pathologies, including isolation, lack of services and funding, multigenerational trauma, normalization of such violence, negative community response, and underreporting of crimes (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Interconnectedness

Survivors and professionals often echoed one another in their analysis of the causes and contributing factors to sexual and domestic violence. However, in other areas their emphases differed, as did their experiences. (Fig. 2). Professionals focused more on the lack of funding and services available in rural Alaskan communities, and the disconnect between state services and rural community values. In contrast, survivors emphasized the multigenerational trauma they had witnessed and experienced within their own families. Both groups spoke about the high prevalence of substance abuse in remote communities, the cyclicality of domestic and sexual violence, and the effects of normalization and isolation in small, rural communities.

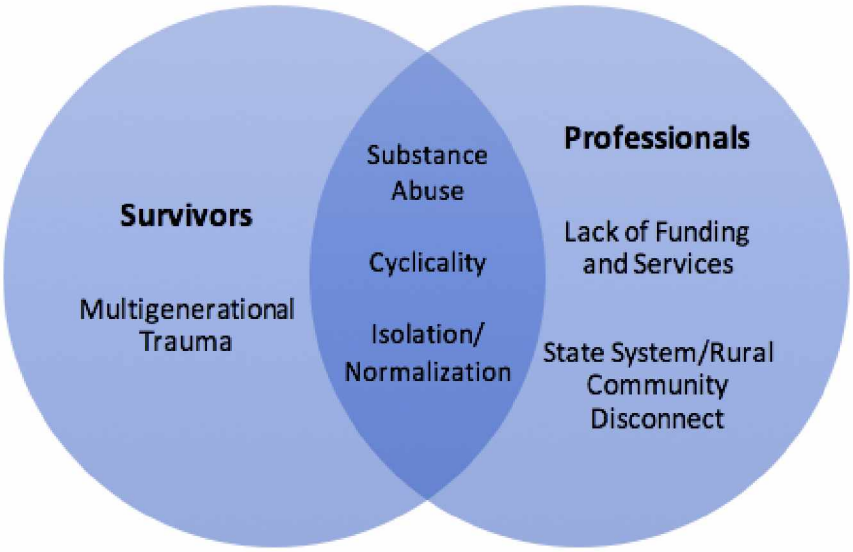

Figure 2: Survivor and Professional Overlap

The first section of this chapter will review the Chapters 1, 2, and 3, and analyze where overlap and divergence occurs between survivor and professional interviews regarding causes and effects of sexual and domestic violence. Despite these variances within each group, survivors differed significantly from professionals in their thoughts about the services provided in rural communities, and they highlighted solutions and concerns that varied from professionals' suggestions. Thus, in the second portion of the chapter I will introduce new information from my interviews as I discuss survivors' and professionals' experiences with services and solutions as they relate to rural Alaska communities. In the final section of this chapter I will contribute my own thoughts and ideas for potential solutions.

5.2 Professional and Survivor Chapter Discussions: Overlap

The overlap and similarities in the testimonies of survivors and professionals in the field of sexual and domestic violence is striking. Both parties covered in detailed and complementary

ways the problems of substance abuse, cyclicality of both victims and perpetrators, and the isolation and normalization of sexual and domestic violence in rural Alaskan communities.

5.2.1 Substance Abuse

Both professionals and survivors spoke at length of the prevalence of substance and alcohol abuse in remote Alaskan communities. Their testimony indicated that substance abuse is pervasive in many small villages across western Alaska, and is often related to high rates of sexual and domestic violence. As discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, published research attests to this correlation across the circumpolar north, as well as in rural communities nationwide.

Survivors of domestic violence frequently discussed their experiences in long term relationships with abusive partners. These partners often abused alcohol and drugs preceding a violent outburst, and survivors stated that as their partners abused substances more habitually the domestic abuse because more vicious. Furthermore, several survivors indicated that they believed that their partners were only abusive *because* they were drinking. Canadian researchers Moffitt and Fikowski reported similar beliefs; they found that alcohol often gave perpetrators an excuse for their violent actions.[3] One of my survivor respondents reported that she only decided to leave her abusive husband when he threatened her while he was sober.

Most of my respondent survivors of both sexual and domestic violence described turning to alcohol themselves either during or in the wake of the abuse. While survivors of domestic violence turned to alcohol while they were still with their abusive partners, survivors of sexual

[3] Pertice Moffitt and Heather Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence: Two Community Narratives," *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Community Research Alliance (*2016): 6.

assault reported that they began abusing substances following the incident(s) of assault, often as a coping mechanism. This reaction is particularly common among survivors of childhood sexual assault, and well documented across the literature, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Indeed, John Briere and Diana M. Elliot suggest that a "significant portion" of survivors of childhood sexual assault currently addicted to substances may be attempting to self-medicate abuse-related depression, anxiety or posttraumatic stress disorder.[4]

As survivors turn to substance abuse, the likelihood of their being victimized in the future increases; approximately one half of women who have been sexually assaulted were drinking alcohol at the time.[5] The matter is further complicated by the stigma that substance abuse often carries. ADA Ruth contended that this stigma of inebriation poses a strong deterrent to reporting the incident, as it can lead to the defamation and shaming of the victim.

5.2.2 Cyclicality

Survivors and professionals alike spoke to the cyclical nature of both sexual and domestic violence, which presented itself in a number of ways. Both survivors and professionals identified victim cyclicality, in which victims of abuse become victims in other abusive situations in the future. Literature on sexual and domestic violence supports this form of cyclicality; Noll argues that a cycle of violence may begin in the form of childhood sexual abuse, which in turn has been linked to higher rates of substance abuse and sexual assault.[6] Gidycz, Coble, Latham and

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[4] John N. Briere, and Diana M. Elliott, "Immediate and Long-Term Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse," *The Future of Children* (1994): 60.
[5] Antonia Abbey et al., "Sexual Assault and Alcohol Consumption: What Do We Know About Their Relationship and What Types of Research are Still Needed?" *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 9, no. 3 (2004): 272.
[6] Abbey et al., "Sexual Assault and Alcohol Consumption," 2; Jennie G. Noll, "Does Childhood Sexual Abuse Set in Motion a Cycle of Violence Against Women? What We Know and What We Need to Learn," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20, no. 4 (2005): 456.

Layman found that women who were sexually abused in childhood were 2.4 times more likely to be re-victimized as adults.[7]

Most professionals recognized the conditions behind victim cyclicality, and surprisingly, the survivors with whom I spoke did as well. Many survivors were reflective and insightful about their life choices and what events precipitated their continued victimization. Often, survivors drew direct correlations between childhood trauma or assault and the victimization that they experienced later in life. It is then critical for the public, as well as professionals entering the field of sexual and domestic violence, to understand the relationship between childhood trauma and subsequent substance abuse and victimization, especially considering that Alaska's rate of childhood sexual assault is six times the national average.[8]

The second type of cyclicality that surfaced in my interviews was that of perpetrator cyclicality. Almost every survivor with whom I spoke stated that the person who had abused him/her had suffered the same type of abuse in the past. The professionals I interviewed confirmed this observation, as discussed at length in Chapters 2 and 3. In my own research, two of the four survivors who had experienced sexual assault stated that their abuser had been sexually assaulted in the past.

While not all children who have been victims of sexual violence become perpetrators, they are statistically more likely to do so than children who were not abused. A 2001 study conducted by Glasser, et al. shows that nationally 30 percent of victims of sexual assault later commit the same crime.[9] Similarly, Holt, Buckley, and Whelana found that the tendency toward

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[7] Christine A, Gidycz et al., "Sexual Assault Experience in Adulthood and Prior Victimization Experiences," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (1993): 152.
[8] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.
[9] M.I. Glasser et al., "Cycle of Child Sexual Abuse: Links Between Being a Victim and Becoming a Perpetrator," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 179, no. 6 (2001): 488. http://bjp.rcpsych.org/content/179/6/482.

violence can be inter-generationally transmitted; young adults who had been exposed to parental violence as children were nearly three times as likely as others to experience violence in their own adult relationships.[10] In accordance with this, every survivor of domestic violence whom I interviewed was abused by a man who had been raised in an abusive household.

5.2.3 Normalization and Isolation

As discussed extensively in previous chapters, sexual and domestic violence are pervasive in many small communities across western Alaska. Both professionals and survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence tied the prevalence of this violence to its normalization. Survivors spoke of family members who urged them to stay with their abusive partner, or took no action when they were sexually abused as children. Nearly all interviewees tied familial and community pressure against speaking out to the normalization of sexual and domestic violence and to underreporting. The normalization in some remote communities occasionally goes so far as to condemn victims for speaking out against their perpetrators. The literature on sexual assault and domestic violence affirms this response. Families often pressure survivors not to create waves within their small communities; Moffitt and Fikowski, and Lewis alike, found that women are often shamed for speaking out against their abusive partners, with rural communities frequently valuing family reputation over personal justice or safety.[11]

The normalization of such violence in some small, rural communities, can contribute to brazenness on the part of perpetrators, and pervasiveness of such acts. When no negative

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[10] Holt, Buckley, Whelana, "The Impact of Exposure to Domestic Violence on Children and Young People: A Review of the Literature," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 32 (2008): 806.
[11] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 7; Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 5.

consequences follow crimes such as these, the lines between acceptable and unacceptable behavior can become blurred, and the violence may become more widespread. Therefore, as both victims and perpetrators sense that their communities find these acts acceptable, through verbal or non-verbal cues, remote communities may inadvertently encourage such acts. Furthermore, due to their isolated nature, rural communities often have limited exposure to broad social norms that could challenge the beliefs or permissiveness of the community at large. This isolation and normalization, then, increases the difficulty for survivors to reach out for help within their communities, and hinders law enforcement in gathering witnesses and evidence.

Several professionals also related witnessing overtly negative community responses toward victims when they reported. The professional believed that this owed to the strong political and hierarchical structure that often exists in rural communities, which may actively dissuade victims from stepping forward.

The overlap and similarities in the testimonies between survivors and professionals in the field of sexual and domestic violence is striking. Both survivors and professionals recognized the widespread and complex nature of sexual and domestic violence in rural Alaskan communities. Furthermore, they both clearly identified complicating or mitigating factors, such as substance abuse, prior victimizations, and normalization within rural communities. I was surprised to see such a strong overlap between the two groups of interviewees, and pleased by the ways in which professionals I interviewed worked to fully understand the nature of sexual and domestic violence as it relates to rural Alaska communities. Divergences rarely owed to disagreement about causes or conditions, but rather stemmed from differing areas of expertise.

5.3 Professionals and Survivors: Divergences

Professionals and survivors rarely disagreed on topics concerning sexual assault and domestic violence directly; rather, they spoke on subjects with which they were familiar. As a result, survivors spoke eloquently about their experiences witnessing multiple generations of abuse within their families, and how it affected them. In contrast, professionals, who may not be privy to the family history of survivors, spoke about the lack of funding and services within their offices, and the inconsistencies they observed between rural community perspectives on sexual assault and domestic violence and State responses to these crimes.

5.3.1 Multigenerational Trauma

The survivors I interviewed spanned a wide range of ages, from their early twenties to mid-seventies. However, regardless of age, most survivors whom I interviewed from rural Alaska discussed the abuse that previous generations of their families had suffered. Several survivors stated that the long-standing violence in their communities and families normalized sexual and domestic violence, with women frequently told that these acts were "just the way it is." One survivor noted that because violence was ever-present, both personally and generationally, it had become a "normal" part of everyday life. Older survivors also spoke of witnessing their adult children turn to drugs, alcohol, or abusive relationships as they grew to adulthood, having been exposed to alcohol abuse and violence as children.

Many women spoke of seeking to break the multigenerational cycle of violence to model healthy relationships for their children. These survivors struggled with leaving their husbands, often against their family or community members' wishes, to provide the safest home possible for their children. Further, they often spoke of their desire to demonstrate a nonviolent life for the

sake of their children's futures. This is an important step for parents to take; while it has been found that witnessing violence in adolescence is a risk factor for substance abuse disorders, the literature also suggests that children who have come from violent homes, yet are nurtured and cared for by their parents, are far less likely to engage in self-harming behaviors, as discussed in Chapter 2.[12]

5.3.2 Lack of Funding and Services

All professionals with whom I spoke discussed in detail the lack of funding, services and personnel in their fields of work. The lack of staffing for the State Trooper office, the District Attorneys' Office, the women's shelter, and the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) nurses' program increased the work load for personnel, particularly if co-workers departed before replacements for their positions were found. This left remaining team members to take up the slack in the wake of their departure, in addition to meeting to the already high demands of their own jobs, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Furthermore, the lack of mental health services in rural Alaskan communities leads to a failure to address many underlying issues that contribute to sexual and domestic violence. The lack of resources directed at primary prevention and services for offenders and survivors leaves law enforcement and criminal justice personnel overwhelmed not only by repeat offenders but by repeat victims.

Professionals discussed specifically the lack of services available in their region for male survivors of sexual or domestic violence. Reporting rates for sexual and domestic violence

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[12] Briere and Elliot, "Impacts of Childhood Sexual Abuse," 56-57; Dean G. Kilpatrick et al., "Risk Factors for Adolescent Substance Abuse and Dependence: Data from a National Sample," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 68, no. 1 (2000): 2, 11, 12.

against young males are thought to be among the lowest worldwide, partially due to the heightened stigma that male victims' experience.[13] Yet, professionals explained, the low number of reports by male victims makes it challenging to document the need for services and to develop programs to meet their needs. Without access to mental health services, young men in rural Alaskan communities may remain within the cycle of violence.

Transiency in the workforce partially explains understaffing in rural Alaska. Oftentimes professionals work in a position for one to two years before moving, being laid off due to budgetary cuts, or simply leaving their jobs. The continual turnover of employees, requires constant training and familiarization of new personnel, increasing the stress load on longer term employees tasked with training incoming workers as well as familiarizing them with the community. Frontline workers in western Alaska field an enormous number of calls and cases, because, as ADA Ruth stated, "western Alaska leads Alaska, and Alaska leads the nation" in rates of sexual and domestic violence. With high employee turnover, staff members who choose to remain must perform not only their own work, but also the tasks of those who leave.

5.3.3 Inconsistencies Between State Government and Community Objectives

Professionals I interviewed often expressed frustration stemming from the inadequacies of the state and federal legal systems as they apply to rural communities. While the logistical challenges discussed above hinder effective responses to sexual and domestic violence, professionals cited rural Alaskan communities' general distrust of the legal system as a more fundamental hindrance to reducing the prevalence of these problems. Several professionals

[13] Gillian Mezey and Michael King, "The Effects of Sexual Assault on Men: A Survey of 22 Victims," *Psychological Medicine* 19, no. 1 (1989): 205.

suggested that this distrust stemmed partially from rural residents' preference for little or no prison time for sexual or domestic offenders, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Close family ties and community dynamics contribute to community members' reluctance to send offenders to prison. Perpetrators or their family members may wield political influence within the town. Nationwide, individuals with financial and political capital enjoy many advantages within the legal system. Yet the distrust of the state legal system coupled with the tendency of rural community members to overlook, excuse, or forgive sexual and domestic violence frustrates law enforcement and criminal justice professionals in their attempts to bring justice to victims of these crimes.

As discussed in Chapter 3, bringing offenders to justice is further complicated by the use of local Tribal Police Officers (TPOs) and Village Police Officers (VPOs), many of whom are employed by tribal governments or by Native non-profit organizations.[14] These non-government agencies sometimes harbor reservations about the state justice system, leading management to interfere with safety officers' efforts to comply with state legal standards. Such "mixed messages" can thwart the apprehension of offenders.

Local distrust of state agencies, especially within rural communities, is common nationwide. Researcher Susan Lewis found that "rural people tend to be suspicious of strangers."[15] This suspicion may result in disdain for outside regulations and agencies, with rural community members and police forces preferring to resolve problems in more private ways. This suspicion trickled into some of the interviews that I conducted with survivors and elders, and will be explored further within this chapter.

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[14] Alaska Department of Public Safety: State Troopers, "Village Public Safety Officers," (Anchorage, Alaska), https://dps.alaska.gov/ast/vpso/faq.

[15] Lewis, *Unspoken Crimes,* 5.

Professionals and survivors identified similar factors contributing to the prevalence of sexual and domestic violence in rural Alaskan communities. Although they approached the topic from different angles, they provided valuable insight based on their experiences working and living in remote communities. While survivors spoke to the cyclicality and multigenerational trauma they have experienced and witnessed, professionals described their experiences working in low-staff, low-funding situations, while providing support to rural Alaskan communities. However, in some cases survivors expressed contrasting views from professionals regarding the services provided to rural communities, and survivors highlighted both solutions and concerns that differed from professionals. These experiences and insights will be examined in the following section.

5.4 Interviewees' Perspectives on Services: Concerns and Solutions

The following section will address both survivor and professional concerns regarding services provided to rural Alaskan communities, and the ways in which they could be improved or adjusted. I have divided this section into four main topics: 1) trust and communication, both as it relates to rural community - state system communication and as it relates to expectations of state services provided; 2) confidentiality in small, rural communities; 3) training for frontline professionals; and 4) survivors' positive experiences with therapy, and how it helped them move forward in their lives. Once again, the topics addressed in this section are not discrete, but are interrelated, as shown in Fig. 3 below. For instance, trust cannot exist without clear communication and professional confidentiality, and communication and confidentiality may not be possible without proper training for incoming professionals.

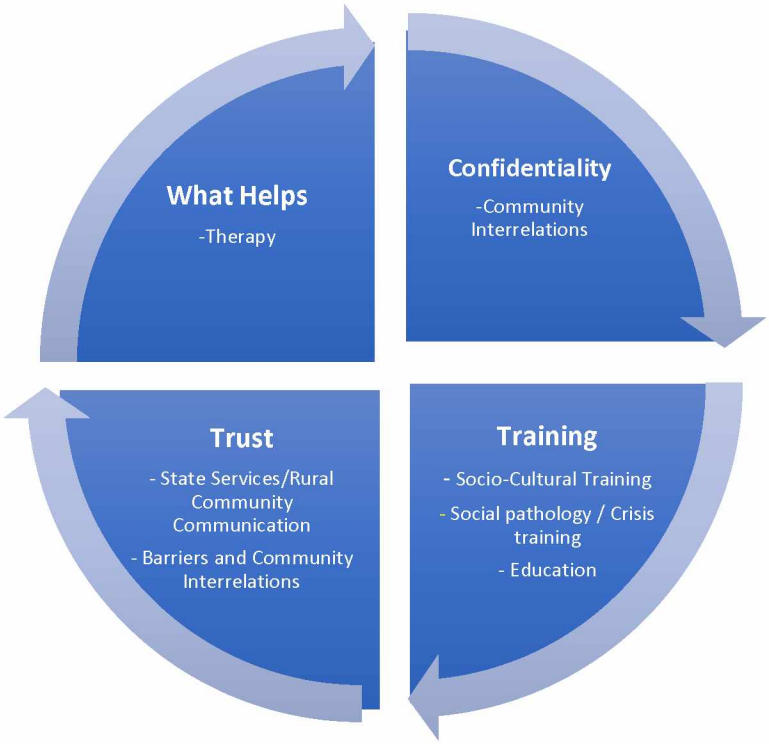

Figure 3: Interviewee's Concerns and Solutions

5.4.1 Trust and Communication

Several survivors and elders with whom I spoke expressed strong distrust of law enforcement agencies. Several rural community residents related negative experiences with law enforcement personnel concerning lesser priority complaints and reports. Because they felt state-funded law enforcement has not laid a groundwork of trust within their communities, these rural residents indicated that they would hesitate to contact authorities with more serious complaints.

Julie, the former head of a rural Alaska women's shelter, suggested that roots of this lack of trust lie partly in the lag time in trooper response. She said the lag time, coupled with the lack of power afforded to local entities when dealing with risk behaviors or overt violent actions, results in a general distrust of state systems. She explained:

> I think that moving in a direction of allowing . . . local communities to have more intervention, earlier on . . . is a major part of the solution . . . By the time troopers get there, OCS [Office of Child Services] gets there, there's typically a lot of harm that's already been done.

Survivors and elders whom I interviewed echoed these sentiments. They expressed doubts about state agencies intervening in emergency situations *before* a crisis point was reached. When state agencies fail to respond during the early signs of a crisis, or in response to minor crises, no foundation of trust exists. Thus, community members hesitate to turn to authorities when they face major crises.

For example, one survivor I interviewed expressed skepticism that state troopers would follow through on larger issues due to their lack of response when she reported instances of bootlegging into her village. This survivor's community instituted a "dry" Local Option policy; residents voted to ban alcoholic beverages within the community.[16] Consequently, when bootleggers want to bring alcohol into the community, they must fly to a town or village that allows alcohol, and pay either an individual or a charter company to fly the alcohol back to the dry village. She related her experience attempting to stop an incoming alcohol flight:

> There's been a lot of bootlegging going on [into my community] . . . My [acquaintance] went to [community name] with a charter . . . I called the SWAT team, gave them information [about the time and place that the airplane charter would be leaving]. But [the bootleggers] made it home. With no trouble. And, my kid's dad [went to a wet community] a couple times to pick up liquor. And I called the police . . . They didn't go to meet him or anything.

Such lack of responsiveness paves the way for distrust of state organizations. Many survivors expressed skepticism that state troopers, police departments, or the office of child

[16] Matthew Berman and Teresa Hull, "Community Control of Alcohol in Alaska," *University of Alaska, Anchorage,* XXXI, no. 1 (1997): 1.

services could be trusted to address more serious offenses effectively. State troopers may not be entirely to blame for the lack of response to these calls. As discussed both above and in Chapter 3, law enforcement agencies in this region are chronically understaffed, and must respond to a wide diversity of cases. Consequently, State Troopers must prioritize incoming calls on a day-to-day basis. They may be unable to devise a standardized call response, and may have to ignore lower priority calls, as they field reports of major crimes such as homicides and rapes.

Rural community members may not recognize the challenges of providing services to communities spread over a vast swath of land, from an office that is frequently at half-staff. Nevertheless, the uncertainty of a prompt response from law enforcement in a time of crisis creates stress and undermines trust between state authorities and rural community members. Greater communication efforts by State Troopers with rural community members could improve understanding and build trust.

The discrepancy between rural communities' expectations and state service providers' intentions contributes to the divide and distrust that exists between them. An elder whom I interviewed described an incident several years ago, in which a springtime flood decimated large portions of her village, and she recounted her subsequent interactions with state workers.

> Look at what happened when we flooded here. [We received help from the] BIA and . . . the Feds. The State was a piece of crap! . . . At three in the morning, the water is coming up, it's a flood that I have never seen in my entire life . . . the water's coming, the ice is coming, the power lines are going. I *call* [The Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management] them, and I tell them: 'You need to get here as soon as you can because, this is terrible. And we're going to lose communication.' . . . They said 'oh it'll be [between twenty-four hours and eight days] . . . before we can help you.' . . . There [were] dead animals, there [were] honey buckets, there [were] outhouses, there [was] *oil* . . . And the state was not interested in our trained, hazmat workers - They had certificates they weren't interested in that. They weren't interested in us.

> Doing anything here. We had to have money ahead, to . . . try to get the stuff back together. And - they were impossible to work with. They'd fly in here with caravan loads of people, and, I had no water, I had no sanitation facilities, I had no food for them. And they just walked through the village and talk to each other about how it looked like Eagle. No – help – whatsoever . . . [Slight laugh] If that ever happened again . . . I wouldn't even call 'em.

This elder clearly felt that the training and known-how of the members of her community had been dismissed, even after they followed the state training protocols and expectations. Furthermore, this state agency appeared, to her eyes, to be flippant and inconsiderate when assessing the destruction of her community's homes and livelihood. However, the state agency personnel may not have understood that community members expected consultation and validation of their expertise, and they may have been unaware of how they inadvertently offended community members. Trust and clear communication often go hand-in-hand.

Julie contends that incoming professionals tend to receive insufficient training in the cultural and historical context of rural communities where they are posted, which contributes to misunderstandings and miscommunication:

> I think that the [state] systems … could potentially do a better job of supporting new employees in learning about the history of rural Alaska . . . I think if we're not, providing context, people are left to come to their own conclusions, and I think that can be really harmful. Because there are individuals working in the systems who have done incredibly good jobs. And others who have had maybe less of a positive influence or experience, and some of that I think comes back to that . . . [people may not] get the best introduction to understanding the context of where they're working.

The lack of training may be compounded by misunderstanding rural community members' expectations regarding problem resolution. Furthermore, the deficit in training may leave service providers unaware of communication efforts that could enhance their relationships with rural communities. These awareness deficits exacerbate the mistrust between the two

entities. Western Alaska, where I conducted my research, is four fifths Alaska Native, which increases the necessity of cultural and historical training for incoming state workers, most of whom are non-Native. [17]

The arrival of migrants of European ancestry in Alaska history brought waves of disease, socio-economic change, and new world views. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries small pox, tuberculosis and influenza swept across the region, killing as much as 60 percent of the Yup'ik, Inuit, and Athabaskan populations. The trauma that resulted has had multi-generational effects; the term "intergenerational trauma" was coined to describe such long-lasting harms.[18] Researchers now recognize that social pathologies associated with trauma can extend intergenerationally, with links from trauma drawn to high rates of depression, PTSD, alienation, and alcohol abuse among Native Americans.[19]

Although my research has focused on the rurality of this region of Alaska, and I interviewed a wide demographic of individuals, I have addressed historical events and forces that continue to impact Alaska's Indigenous communities, because many of my respondents are Alaska Native, and the region is predominantly Yup'ik. I believe that professionals would benefit from knowledge of the history and close family and community ties within villages of the region. Without understanding the context of the region, professionals entering western Alaska may find themselves ineffective in achieving their own goals and those of community members.

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[17] Darryl S. Wood et al., "Police Presence, Isolation, & Sexual Assault Prosecution," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 22, no. 3 (2011): 332, DOI: 10.1177/0887403410375980.

[18] Harold Napoleon and Eric Christopher Madsen, *Yuuyaraq: The Way of the Human Being: With Commentary*, (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks, College of Rural Alaska, Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, 1991), 10.

[19] Karina L. Walters, Jane M. Simoni, and Teresa Evans-Campbell, "Substance Abuse Among American Indians and Alaska Natives: Incorporating Culture in an Indigenish Stress Coping Paradigm," *Public Health Reports* 117, no. 1 (2002): 109.

Yet without additional funding and personnel, state agencies lack the resources to provide such education and training. High turnover in law enforcement and other state agencies, as discussed in Chapter 3, makes the prospect of providing such training even more daunting. However, enhancing the preparation of professionals entering western Alaska, may improve their effectiveness and their experience and therefore increase the length of their service in the region. Yet law enforcement personnel face additional barriers to their effectiveness in rural communities.

Serving in their home communities poses barriers to reporting for safety officers, owing to close family and community ties. One survivor, who had experienced physical abuse for several years at the hands of her children's father, explained the complicated reasons that she hesitated to call the VPO's who served her community:

> My kid's dad was a VPO, and he had drank the evidence bottles with the . . . other night shift worker. They're all into drinking and smoking. They don't respond really fast . . . There's a chief, and that chief is [related to] my kids' dad. They live in the same house. I have never felt comfortable about calling him. Like if it was my kid's dad that was doing something, I never felt comfortable calling him. [The chief is] a really quiet, quiet person, and. Like he's afraid of my kid's dad.

Knowing the individuals who comprised the VPO force in her hometown made this survivor hesitant to call them for help in an emergency. Not only, she states above, do they drink, smoke, and respond slowly, but owing to VPO chief's relation to, and fear of, her abusive partner, she felt that she could not count on them to defend her should the need arise.

Yet VPOs often find themselves in impossible situations. Their minimal training leaves them underprepared for the demands of their positions. As discussed in Chapter 3, VPOs receive

just two weeks of training and are not required to have a high school diploma or a GED.[20] While they are expected to provide the same on-the-ground law enforcement services as police officers, and are often the first responders on the scene of a crime, they receive less pay. Furthermore, officers are often required to investigate their friends, family members, and neighbors, and, as this survivor indicated above, they may be investigating all three.

Survivors indicated that the lack of training and education required for VPO or TPO positions weakened their trust in the officers further. One survivor said this of the VPO's who serve her home community:

> They're, uneducated people. That don't have their GED or high school diploma . . . Most are friends with [my husband]. They're young. There's – I don't think there's anybody working in the [VPO] station that's over thirty . . . The chief is . . . I think he's twenty-two.

While youth is not necessarily a sign of incompetence, I believe that this demonstrates the lack of long-term commitment that the VPO position engenders in their personnel, and further erodes public confidence in their reliability. This was confirmed by ADA Ruth who noted that safety officers tend to rotate in and out of the position as often as every week, returning when they need the money. VPO's transience within the system hinders keeping each officer up to date on the procedures, requirements, and expectations of the job, and sometimes leads to their failure to secure the needed information from a crime scene. Although professionals acknowledged deficiencies in the VPO system, they agreed that it was a superior alternative to no law enforcement.

[20] Wood et al., "Police Presence," 331.

Many survivors expressed skepticism that their local VPOs or TPOs would follow through on calls made to their office. One survivor related an incident in which a relative had frightened away a VPO sent to perform a welfare check on their children. She stated:

> They [the VPO's] didn't even walk in the house they just left . . . And nobody else came after that.

This incident illustrated to this survivor that law enforcement personnel in her home community are easily cowed and driven away from potential altercations. Consequently, she said she felt they were unreliable, and could not be depended upon to keep the peace or enforce laws or regulations. Another survivor related the story of a break-in at her parent's house. She stated that although the perpetrator was located, local law enforcement never filed charges or demanded compensation for items lost or broken. Although these accounts may refer to minor offenses, I believe they undermine community trust and confidence in local paraprofessionals, much as the instance noted above concerning the State Trooper failure to apprehend a bootlegger undermined trust and confidence in state funded law enforcement.

Amber, the women's shelter employee I interviewed, stated of VPOs in remote communities:

> I helped down at the VPO training . . . It was the end of their training, they were doing scenarios . . . It's their only time responding before they go out and actually respond . . . And seeing how some of them handle these scenarios . . . it was frightening . . . They're nervous, they're new, it's to be expected, but . . . we're sending these folks [into potentially dangerous situations] —it's not fair to them, any more than it's not fair to the community they're going to serve.

Professionals and survivors alike referred to VPOs' and TPOs' lack of training before they begin serving in rural communities, noting implications for the quality of service they provide. While certainly not all VPOs provide substandard assistance, they unquestionably are saddled with

immense responsibilities, frequently with no backup. When such paraprofessionals lack the training required to handle delicate or potentially explosive situations, and when they are intimately related to individuals involved in the crime, it can be difficult for community members to trust them to handle serious cases.

5.4.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to exhibiting trust in another person or entrusting someone with sensitive, private, or secret information. This implies that if a situation calls for confidentiality, one individual is entrusting another with private matters they do not want shared. Many of the work performed by first responders in rural communities is confidential in nature. Professionals who perform this work are expected, if not legally bound, not to disclose information that they may witness or overhear during their employment. However, a recurrent theme I found in my interviews with survivors was that local professionals could not be relied upon to maintain confidentiality. A large part of this hesitation was due to the interrelation and community ties between first responders, victims and those accused of violent crimes. One woman stated of the health aide who serves her community:

> Right now the health aide that we have has broken a lot of confidentiality. A *lot* . . . she is a part of the community. But, she's really, like *biased*, you know? She's just. She goes home and she tells them [her family what she witnessed while working].

Such breaches of confidentiality can damage people's reputations as gossip flourishes locally. Moffitt and Fikowski note that community gossip stigmatizes and marginalizes survivors, effectively silencing them and inhibiting reporting.[21] The effects of confidentiality violations and

[21] Moffitt and Fikowski, "Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence," 18.

resulting gossip were well known and feared by survivors; the woman quoted above chose to go to a larger and distant community for care, rather than risk word spreading locally of her assault. Similarly, another survivor reported of the community in which she grew up:

> There were [resources in the village] but, they were people that knew me, and I know them, and I grew up with them. And it's the confidentiality thing that stopped me [from reporting].

This survivor moved to a different, larger community before seeking help for the abuse that she had experienced, rather than risk the community knowing. Several survivors spoke about local professionals breaking confidentiality as if it were an inevitable occurrence, stating casually that local professionals always "break confidentiality," or that "word always gets out." Often word spreads owing to the interrelations between first responders and other community members.

While fewer concerns arose regarding State Trooper confidentiality, the arrival of a Trooper in a village signals a crisis and stirs speculation. One survivor stated that they come out to the village "only if something really bad happens." Therefore, she explained, she did not contact the troopers following a violent incident in her hometown: if the Troopers had arrived on the scene, the incident "would be highlighted in [the village] and everybody would know."

Nearly every survivor whom I interviewed referenced the issue of confidentiality as a barrier to reporting. While not every survivor was directly related to the VPOs or health aides in their community, many recognized that should they approach a VPO or health aide following a violent incident, the entire community would soon be privy to the details of the event. This particularly concerned survivors of domestic violence or incest, who had often spent many years hiding their abuse from their friends and family. As a result of the secrecy surrounding many

crimes of this nature, survivors often hesitate to step forward, fearing that their stories could be leaked, or become fodder for gossip.

Fear of breaches in confidentiality posed such a deterrent for some survivors, that when asked if they thought itinerant mental health care providers could provide much needed services in rural communities, they often hesitated to agree. One survivor stated that while she thought it would be beneficial, she would not have them identify themselves publicly as mental health providers. If a community member were seen visiting a mental health provider, she said, this would alert the rest of the community that things were amiss, making the person vulnerable to community-wide gossip. I believe that if more training were provided for these first responders that emphasized the necessity of confidentiality, leaks such as these could be greatly reduced, and survivors would be more inclined to report in their home communities.

5.4.3 Training and Education

Multiple survivors identified lack of training for professionals in the field as a major impediment to reporting. Following a sexual assault or incident of domestic violence, survivors are in a sensitive and fragile frame of mind. Coming forward, either to report or to seek help, can be a difficult proposition under the best of circumstances. However, if the professionals they speak to are not properly trained, the survivor may be re-traumatized.

One survivor related an incident that occurred when she was under the age of 18. While visiting a neighboring community she "made the mistake" of telling one of her friends that she had been molested as a child. This disclosure set into motion a chain of events that led to an adult contacting the local police department, instead of a state trooper station. This police department

did not have an authorized Violet Offenders Unit, and interaction with their personnel was a harrowing experience for the survivor. She described her interactions with the police officer:

> The law enforcement [officer] made me [pause] tell the story, of what happened to me, in *great, grave* detail . . . I had to say it specifically, exactly what he [the perpetrator] did [during the assault]. And that's what messed me up the most, was . . . having to relive it. And that's what triggered PTSD . . . It was, um, it was traumatizing. Because I hadn't confronted, the experience before like that. I'd never confronted it. And so hitting it *hard* that way *really* messed me up.

Lacking VOU training, this police officer pushed the underage survivor to relive some of the most traumatic experiences in her life. Following reporting, the survivor told me that she began experiencing flashbacks to the assaults, as well as anxiety and panic attacks. However, despite the trauma that her reporting induced, little came of it:

> [The police officer] wasn't helpful because . . . he, wasn't doing his job right . . . He didn't, report it right. He did the wrong requirements. I don't know what the right way is, what the right process and procedures are, but I was told by an . . . State Trooper, who I'm now in contact with that he did it completely wrong.

The police officer reportedly did not follow conduct follow-up procedures, and a result no arrest was made of the man who had raped her, and her information was not passed along to more qualified personnel or departments. Due to of her negative interaction with the police officer, it was several years until she contacted the State Trooper office independently in a second attempt to apprehend the perpetrator. Proper training in appropriate interviewing of survivors of sexual and domestic violence could have minimized the trauma this victim experienced.

In contrast, Trooper Justin described the year of training he underwent before being certified as an Alaska State Trooper. Since that time, he has spent over a decade working in western Alaska, and at the time of our interview, he had served a year as a member of the Violent Offenders Unit (VOU). My respondents raised virtually no concerns regarding State

Trooper handling of sensitive cases. I believe the training that they receive before working in the field, and the additional training provided to the Violent Offenders Unit, explains this professionalism.

Training is essential to producing quality law enforcement personnel. While officers inevitably face situations for which they are not prepared, training provides a basis for situational responses that individuals may not have considered. One study found that workplace training improves employees' self-efficacy, motivation, and reactions while performing the job trained for.[22] Improved outcomes are further demonstrated by the effectiveness of the nationally implemented Sexual Assault Response (SART) teams, whose professional teams receive funding and training to respond both professionally and compassionately to victims of sexual assault. Following the implementation of SART, annual rates of domestic violence have dropped by as much as 64 percent nationwide.[23]

Survivors I interviewed affirmed the importance in first responder training; they generally had positive feedback concerning VPSO's, but were more equivocal concerning VPO's. Granted, training for VPO's may be difficult to implement, as they are overseen by local village or tribal entities, rather than regional corporations. These entities often lack the resources to pay for additional training for local VPO's. Additionally, these positions are hard to fill, as discussed previously, so hiring entities may fear that requiring further training would discourage potential applicants.

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[22] Wei-Tao Tai, "Effects of Training Framing, General Self-efficacy and Training Motivation on Trainees' Training Effectiveness," *Personnel Review* 35, no. 1 (2006): 61.

[23] White House Council on Women and Girls (U.S.), *Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action*, Washington, DC: White House Council on Women and Girls, Office of the Vice President, January 2014, 20.

Enhanced training would also benefit employees of women's shelters, which often house women in the immediate aftermath of crises. While most women described positive experiences in shelters, where they often received food, clothing, counseling, and support, not all women's shelters were equally supportive. The following testimony relates to an incident that took place in a larger hub-community and is unrelated to the women's shelter in which I conducted my research.

This survivor of domestic violence told me about an episode in which she checked herself into a women's shelter. Her husband had not abused her prior to this decision, but she felt threatened and vulnerable, as well as protective of her newborn child.

The survivor stated that she had struggled in her relationship with her husband's family. Her husband's mother had told her on multiple occasions that her husband's pushing her was normal, and that she should treat it as such. This made her feel misunderstood and confused about how to respond to her husband. However, when she entered the women's shelter, rather than feeling protected and accepted, she felt manipulated for their own ends. The survivor described her experience:

> Here's how I [felt] when I walked into the place [shelter]: I was like 'I'm not one of them. My husband wasn't in his right mind' . . . But then they have this session to tell you 'No. You are abused. You are abused. Through this, this, this, this, this way.' But . . . [my husband's] mom said "it's normal for him to push you." [What] the shelter . . . [said is] almost the same thing [my husband's] mom said [but] in the opposite way. You need to find a middle ground . . . But, what I'm trying to say is, do I feel good, for knowing the people I love the most abused me? For someone to tell me over and over and over?

This interaction was equally as upsetting to the survivor as the normalization of the behavior she experienced with her husband's family. She approached the shelter hoping to be heard and

protected, something that she had not experienced with her husband or his family. However, instead she was barraged by shelter employees who pigeonholed her as a victim of abuse before she was ready to identify as such. As a result, she felt more defensive of both her husband and their relationship than she may have otherwise, and she returned home before she had formed her own opinions regarding her situation.

Women leaving an abusive situation have often been manipulated or harmed both emotionally and physically.[24] Professionals working with them must recognize this and respect survivors' mental and physical autonomy. The New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence advises that advocates "must help restore autonomy," and use language that emphasizes survivors "rights and liberties."[25] I believe that if this women's shelter had trained and educated their employees concerning appropriate communication with survivors of sexual and domestic violence, they could have reduced, rather than heightened, this survivor's distress.

Many women's shelters perform a vital, difficult, and eminently valuable function in assisting women coming from violent situations. The testimony of a woman who had a positive and helpful experience in a different shelter will illustrate this point. This survivor had been married to her abusive husband for over five years. When she finally left, she traveled to a nearby women's shelter. She described her experience at the shelter:

> The advocate came and she sat with me . . . I was like 'can we go check on the kids? Like, my imagination is going overboard.' And, I told her that I . . . could imagine him [my husband] . . . taking the kids . . . She said yeah, and we went up and we checked them . . . I think we did that three times . . . And then while I was talking to her I started crying . . . And I cried so hard . . . even if I wanted to stop crying I couldn't . . . and then finally I

[24] Orin Strauchler et al., "Humiliation, Manipulation, and Control: Evidence of Centrality in Domestic Violence Against an Adult Partner," *Journal of Family Violence* 19, no. 6 (2004): 339.
[25] New York State: Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, "Information for Professionals," http://www.opdv.ny.gov/professionals/abusers/coercivecontrol.html

> calmed down, and, and I . . . said 'what was that?!' And she said 'all your stress building, all your anxiety, and all your fear, and all your everything you're holding in.' . . . But afterwards, it was like - like something was lifted.

The advocate working at this women's shelter appears to have done everything right. She not only helped the survivor to check on her children and ensure their safety, but also allowed the survivor to process her emotions in her own time, in her own way. Women's shelters can be difficult places to work and maintain rules. However, training that emphasizes shelter regulations as well as empathetic interactions with incoming women can allow shelters to provide consistently healthier environments for survivors. One professional I interviewed said she thought shelter advocates should be provided "social abuse training or crisis training" in addition to their current training.

Such education for adolescents and teens in schools could produce long-term benefits. Although it may be difficult to implement a region-wide program, individual schools could work to educate their students not only about health, but also about substance abuse, healthy relationships, and good communication. This small step in educating youth may help them to understand how to communicate with one another, and potentially halt a violent situation before it begins. Several survivors stated that they felt parents should reach out to their children's teachers to ensure that their children had a support network at school. One survivor said she believed one reason her children had not fallen into drug and alcohol abuse following her divorce from her violent husband was that she had reached out to school teachers, nurses, and counselors in their school. Another survivor and professional stated that children would benefit from having "somebody to talk to them at the schools . . . about what's right or wrong." This, she stated, could help them to understand how to handle trauma they experience, rather than turning to drugs or

alcohol as a numbing agent. I believe that such school programs could help minimize violence in rural communities, particularly considering that Alaska's childhood sexual assault rate is six times the national average.[26]

Many larger communities have taken action to increase training and cross-disciplinary communication. Chapter 3 included ADA Ruth's description of the multi-disciplinary team of professionals with whom she works. She also spoke of efforts in some small, rural communities to help reduce alcohol and violence.

> There are tribes that are doing exceptional programming on domestic violence, and really doing integration back into the community. The first one that comes off my head is Akiak, and Mike Williams senior, who is an alcohol counselor out there. He's one of the leaders of the tribe there, and is doing really excellent work in trying to address some of the social issues that are causing the domestic violence, and the alcoholism, and, really trying to work with young people in the community.

These community-based programs are essential for creating community cohesion and addressing serious issues locally. By educating young men and women, rural communities can change the norms that contribute to high rates of sexual and domestic violence, as well as substance abuse, that some experience.

5.4.4 What is Helping

The most consistent suggestion I heard from survivors concerning ways to aid victims in rural communities, was increasing the availability of therapeutic counseling for survivors of crimes. Of the six survivors whom I interviewed, five stated that they felt counseling and therapy helped them move past the violent experiences in their past. The fifth, who had the negative

[26] *Alaska Victimization Survey,* UAA Justice Center, 2016.

experience at the women's shelter, stated that talking about her experiences with close friends helped her move on. One survivor stated that counseling helped her to understand the source of her anxieties.

> I started going to [counseling], and . . . they think my anxiety comes from seeing . . . how he [my dad] had aimed a gun at us. I was a little girl . . . and I was crying. Really scared. I was standing behind my mom and my dad was pointing a rifle at us. And then I don't remember what happened after that . . . And that's, they think that's where I get my anxiety from. From what I've seen.

This survivor's experience with therapy helped her to comprehend her own complex emotions, which seemed to lift a burden from her. She saw more clearly that the abuse she and her mother had suffered at the hands of her father had changed the way she saw the world. Another survivor stated of her experience in counseling:

> Treatment helped me, learn grounding techniques, and it helped me realize that I had self-worth, and it helped teach me a little bit about self-love . . . And I decided then that I needed to change my behavior, dramatically. And it didn't happen overnight, but I slowly became a better person, and I, the way I like to describe it is I slowly started to come back to myself, and I became more comfortable with my body, and who I was, as a person.

Reflecting on her past experiences, and how they had affected her life choices helped this survivor make healthier decisions. The opportunity to talk to someone about their experiences was a novel concept for some survivors. This may partially explain why some survivors chose to participate in my project; I was interested and empathetic, and I guaranteed them confidentiality to the best of my ability. Possibly the interview experience reconfirmed for some the healing powers of counseling and therapy.

Paul, a survivor of childhood sexual assault, who mentors young men and boys, described how his first experience confronting his assault unfolded.

> I'd went down to this conference . . . and they had male sexual abuse work shop . . . So, I . . . went in and there was a young man up there and he was talking. And he was talking about relationships, and he's talking about fighting, and he's talking about drinking, and, all this stuff. And, I finally had to raise my hand, and I said 'I know you're talking about you, but you're really talking about me.' You know and when I said those words, it was like, the dam broke, and I could not quit crying. I cried and I cried and I cried, and it's like my wife said, that's the kind of crying you need to do . . . and I was very fortunate because there was a lot of people in the room that knew, and understood, so they supported me . . . So, now, you know it's like I used to want to sit clear in the back of the room all the time, and now you know I can get up in front of three, four, five hundred people and tell my story. Tell-talk about 'okay this is what, this is what these unresolved issues can do to you.'

Paul said that by confronting the trauma from his past, he was able to move beyond it. He now works as a mentor for young men and boys, helping to educate them about how sexual or domestic assault can affect them, and what steps they can take to remain or become healthy and happy adults. Yet Paul is one of the few professionals providing services to male victims of sexual or domestic violence, who comprise one of the most overlooked demographics worldwide. It is equally important to reach out to male and female victims of assault and provide them with counseling that can help them to heal.

All the professionals whom I interviewed agreed that therapy for survivors leaving violent relationships is critical to their recovery. Both the Assistant District Attorney and all the shelter employees, who worked with victims of sexual and domestic violence over long periods of time, highlighted the lack of mental health resources as a major impediment to victims' recovery. These professionals felt that without mental health services, victims and survivors would turn to other, potentially more harmful alternatives to cope with the trauma they had experienced.

5.5 Recommendations

The following section presents suggestions that I believe could help aid survivors of sexual and domestic violence and that could reduce such violence in the future. I have drawn on my previous three chapters, as well as the new information that I presented above, to identify steps that I believe could make a difference. I have broken these actions down as local paraprofessional training, frontline professional training, communication, and education, which I discuss in detail below.

5.5.1 Local Paraprofessional Training

The services provided in rural Alaskan communities raise several questions concerning training protocols and effectiveness. Paraprofessionals, such as VPOs, TPOs and VPSOs, perform vital functions in rural communities, in handling minor crimes and securing crime scenes. Research shows that such paraprofessionals help lower crime rates in the communities they serve. However, many VPOs act as first responders on the scene of a crime, securing witness participation and ensuring that perpetrators do not escape, tasks for which they are insufficiently trained.

I believe that the training currently provided to newly hired VPOs is unfair both to them, and to the community members they serve. Enforcing laws is stressful, regardless of location, but small rural communities present additionally challenges. Currently, unfilled positions and inadequate training leave community members doubting whether their calls will be answered, and what level of professionalism and confidentiality they can expect.

Although many village entities may lack the funding necessary to increase training for their VPOs, I believe that as little as one day of training could make the difference in the way

VPOs handle their cases and help survivors and local community members feel more secure in calling their local law enforcement agencies. Such training could be supplemental, emphasizing confidentiality, social/sexual/domestic abuse, and crisis management. Survivors identified these concerns specifically as obstacles to reporting or seeking help in abusive situations. Given the high rates of sexual and domestic violence in small rural Alaska communities, I believe it is important to train frontline workers, from VPOs to health aides, on how to respond thoughtfully and confidentially when such situations arise.

5.5.2 Frontline Professional Training

Sexual and domestic violence, substance abuse, and the normalization of these acts exist within a cycle, as discussed both above, and in Chapters 1, 2, and 3. Children exposed to sexual and/or domestic violence in the home at an early age run a much higher risk of falling into such patterns of behavior in adolescence or adult life. Often, survivors turn to substance abuse to cope with the trauma that witnessing or experiencing such acts provokes. Furthermore, the likelihood that they will be re-victimized in adulthood increases, as does dependence on substances. When these acts are normalized in a family or community, many survivors do not report their victimization. This contributes to higher levels of such crimes, as perpetrators fail to be apprehended or punished for their actions (Fig. 4).

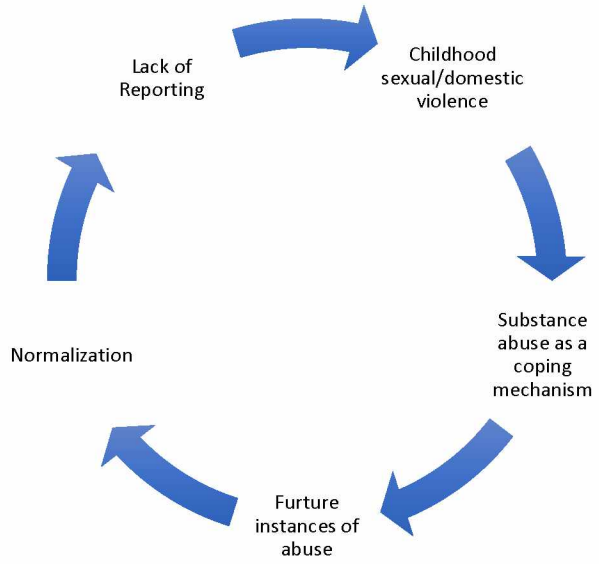

Figure 4: Cycle of Abuse

A culture of non-interference, which prevails in many small, rural communities discourages reporting of abuse and thwarts apprehension of offenders. This social norm can lead community members not only to fail to intervene in the face of known abuse, but to encourage victims of domestic violence to remain with their partners, thereby normalizing domestic abuse. Furthermore, public knowledge of the previous victimization of perpetrators may cause community members, including the victims of these perpetrators to empathize with or even excuse violent and abusive acts.

My research has led me to believe that professionals entering western Alaska and other rural areas would benefit from training and education in the histories and cultures of their assigned regions and in local social conditions. Professionals who work closely with victims of sexual/domestic violence and people with substance abuse disorders may not fully understand the depth of the social problems they encounter. Therefore, for instance, professionals working in

a women's shelter may not provide the empathy and care that individuals suffering from substance abuse disorders need. Alternately, if law enforcement, criminal justice personnel, or health providers are not educated on the intersection of these problems, they may not deliver culturally informed or topical advice, care, or action. Because these professionals are often first responders to victims of violent crimes, it is essential to train and educate them about the history and intersections of these social problems. Such preparation would aid professionals in providing effective assistance to individuals from rural communities who are struggling with socially complex problems.

Certainly not all professionals lack background information on the region in which they serve, and I believe that those who have educated themselves have had a positive impact in those regions. The professionals whom I interviewed were both knowledgeable and empathetic, although they indicated that incoming professionals are sometimes less informed. Additionally, my interviews with elders and some survivors suggested certain fundamental misunderstandings between community members and state authorities or professionals. I believe that if institutions worked to train and educate their personnel, positive interactions could become the norm.

5.5.3 Communication

Part of the mistrust between law enforcement and state agencies on the one hand and community members on the other lies in a miscommunication between these entities. Law enforcement agencies in western Alaska are often overworked and understaffed, as discussed both above and in Chapter 3. I believe that this sometimes leads to these agencies' inability to respond to lower priority calls as more serious reports of homicides and rapes come in. However, when the public is unaware of these constraints, individuals may construe law enforcement's

lack of response to low priority calls as neglect or indifference. Owing to miscommunication and lack of information, rural community members may have unrealistic expectations of state services and law enforcement, impressions that result in mistrust of state agencies.

In the course of my interviews, I found that survivors and elders valued communication and therapy above all other forms of support. For example, the elder who described a flooding event in her town, appeared most upset that state agency personnel did not communicate with community members while assessing the situation. Survivors' interest in therapy above all other helping strategies suggests to me that these individuals value communicating their opinions and experiences, *and being heard*, as they simultaneously seek to understand others' actions.

As such, I believe that if state agencies took active steps to communicate their prioritization method of call response, the distrust that currently exists could be reduced. For other state agencies entering rural communities, training should be provided concerning how to enter a small community respectfully and inclusively, clearly communicating the agencies' goals and agendas, as well as their limitations.

One way this could be achieved is by implementing cross-cultural training, which has been shown to be effective in improving interactions across a variety of cultures.[27] Yet this level of communication may not be attainable between every state agency and each rural community. Thus, I suggest that the State of Alaska implement a number of community liaison positions. These positions could work out of hub communities to maintain contact with smaller rural communities, field their concerns, and act as go-betweens for rural community members and the state or federal agencies with which they interact. Further, individuals in such positions could

[27] J. Stewart Black and Mark Mendenhall, "Cross-cultural Training Effectiveness: A Review and a Theoretical Framework for Future Research," *Academy of Management Review* 15, no. 1 (1990): 113.

help communities search and apply for grants that could aid rural citizens in addressing challenges the committees face. Federal and state grants may be given for basic amenities, such septic systems and running water, which many remote communities in western Alaska lack. However, other such grants exist for mental health treatment programs, local health aides, community centers, and educational programs. Community liaisons could identify the needs of surrounding rural communities, and apply for grants that would help their residents. Further, such positions may help to lessen the pressure of outreach for state agencies, while still paving the way for clear communication and information exchange.

5.5.4 Public Education

I believe that public education concerning the social problems that rural areas often experience will help reduce violence in these regions. Rural communities are often difficult to access or leave. As a result, urban Alaskans without ties to remote communities may be unaware of the social problems they face, especially the cyclicality and intersections of these social problems. This ignorance shapes public perceptions and treatment of survivors on a day-to-day basis. Educating the public could reduce the stigma surrounding sexual/domestic violence and alcohol abuse, while facilitating conversations concerning services. In particular, such education concerning male survivors of sexual and domestic violence, could reduce the stigma and encourage survivors to step forward. Increasing public knowledge of intergenerational trauma and cyclicality may shift public opinion and grow support for mental health services for those affected.

5.5.5 Local Education and Initiatives

Finally, education concerning the long-lasting effects and cyclicality of sexual and domestic violence should also be offered to youth within school settings in small, rural communities. Although it may be difficult to implement a state-wide program, individual schools should work to educate their students not only about health, but also about substance abuse, healthy relationships, and good communication. Such education may help youth to understand how to communicate effectively, and potentially halt a violent situation before it begins. Furthermore, such programs would help children who come from violent homes learn to process and seek help for the trauma they have experienced, rather than turning to harmful alternatives.

In some cases after school programs may be more effective. Such programs could bring youth together to discuss ways in which violent acts can be reduced or halted at the local level. Additionally, by speaking openly about the interrelation between normalization, sexual and domestic violence, and alcohol abuse, the stigma for individuals experiencing one or all of these social problems may be lessened. Further, by emphasizing prevention and healthy relationships at a local level, youth may be able to change the violent norms in their home communities. Although local communities or tribes may not have the money to fund such a program, federal and state grants are available for those communities that are interested in developing them.

5.6 Conclusion

The issues surrounding sexual and domestic violence are complex and multifaceted. Each contributing factor touches upon and compounds another. In this way, sexual violence, domestic violence, substance abuse, normalization, underreporting, multigenerational trauma, a lack of

funding and services, and isolation intertwine to create toxic environments for survivors while requiring a high level of professional expertise to respond to needs.

Survivors and professionals whom I interviewed drew from their own experiences and spoke of the conditions they believe contribute to the high rates of sexual and domestic violence in Alaska. While they agreed on many topics regarding contributing factors to sexual and domestic violence, they differed somewhat in their knowledge and experiences. Survivors and professionals diverged most notably in their perceptions of the services provided to rural Alaskan communities, and where improvement could be made. As a result of these insights, I have compiled solutions that I believe are attainable for professional offices in rural Alaska and that may help them to provide the best quality services to their communities. These solutions include social abuse and crisis training for rural paraprofessionals; socio-cultural training for frontline professional workers; and improved communication between rural Alaskan communities and the state agencies that serve them, possible via a cultural liaison. I also recommend public education concerning the long term, complex, and multigenerational effects of sexual and domestic violence, including programs provided for youth, so that the conditions and norms that perpetuate these problems can be changed.

Both the survivors and professionals who spoke to me openly shared their experiences as well as their thoughts on causes and remedies to social problems in rural Alaska. It is important to note, however, that their perspectives do not necessarily apply to rural communities as a whole. Nevertheless, these individuals' personal and professional experiences provide them valuable insight into the circumstances in rural communities that contribute to high rates of sexual and domestic violence, and what steps can be taken to lessen the stigma for survivors, and

increase aid for victims. I hope that portraying their views, along with my analysis of our interviews, will contribute to viable solutions to this pervasive violence.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

As I worked in biology field camps in western Alaska several years ago, high school students stationed at my camp began to confide in me their experiences with sexual and domestic violence. Although I had known that these issues were pervasive throughout rural Alaska, their stories were the first time that I fully understood how these crimes affect people's lives and futures. What haunts me still is the silence that these survivors lived in every day, often surrounded by the perpetrators of these violent and intimate crimes.

The young ladies' stories affected me so deeply that I committed to providing a platform for survivors a way to tell their stories. I returned to school and entered the Arctic and Northern Studies program, where I learned the best methods to conduct interviews with survivors of trauma. In the year of 2016, I traveled to two communities in western Alaska, and interviewed survivors, elders, and professionals in the field of domestic violence and sexual assault using oral history methodology. Despite my project's exemption from UAF's Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, due to my use of oral history methodology, I followed IRB protocols, as well as the requirements of the Oral History Association.

I began my project with the goal to fill the gap the in the literature with the voices of survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, knowing that survivors would have unique insight not only on the short- and long-term impacts of these crimes, but on factors contributing to the violence and the silence that surrounds it. However, upon arriving at one of my study sites I realized that I had a unique opportunity not only to interview survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, but to speak with professionals and elders on the topic. My primary goal has been to give survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence a platform to speak openly about their experiences living in small communities, often near the perpetrator of the crime. My

research questions were: 1) What do survivors want others to know about how this experience has affected them? 1) What are the differences and similarities between how survivors, elders, and professionals view the issues of sexual assault and domestic violence in small, remote communities? 2) How do survivors, elders and professionals compare and differ on topics concerning intervention strategies, help strategies, and the circumstances that have contributed to such high rates of these crimes in rural Alaska?

I interviewed a total of fourteen individuals. Some of these were elders, some survivors, some advocates for victims of sexual and/ domestic violence, and some were all three. All told, I interviewed six survivors, of whom five were female and one male; eight advocates; five elders; one Alaska State Trooper; and one Assistant District Attorney. Following these interviews, I transcribed each individual's interview, and kept the hard copies in a locked safe in a locked room in the Arctic and Northern Studies office on the University of Alaska campus. I have done, and will continue to do, everything in my power to protect the identity of the survivors with whom I spoke.

The most prominent themes that my research revealed are the interrelatedness of social problems, and the conditions within rural Alaskan communities that hinder reducing these problems. The variables, or conditions, that my respondents highlighted included: alcohol abuse, multigenerational trauma, lack of funding for services, isolation, and normalization of sexual assault and domestic violence.

Both survivors and professionals spoke in depth about the connections between sexual and domestic violence on the one hand, and alcohol abuse, isolation, and normalization on the other. Their analyses highlighted the interrelatedness and cyclicality of these social problems, which was further identified in the literature on sexual and domestic violence. Based on my

research, including both interviews and an extensive literature review, I have come to understand that children who have been exposed to sexual and/or domestic violence in the home run a much higher risk of falling into such patterns of behavior in adolescence and adulthood. Often, these survivors turn to substance abuse to cope with the trauma that witnessing or experiencing such events frequently provokes. If they fall into chronic substance abuse patterns, the likelihood that they will be re-victimized in adulthood increases, as does heavier dependence on these substances. Furthermore, when violent acts are normalized in a family or community, many survivors do not report their victimization. This contributes to higher levels of such crimes, as perpetrators remain free to re-offend. Additionally, a culture of non-interference often prevails in small, rural communities, discourages victims from reporting the abuse. This social norm, which aims to foster community cohesiveness and peace, can lead community members not only to fail to intervene in response to known abuse, but to encourage victims of domestic violence to remain with their partners. Finally, public knowledge of perpetrators' histories of victimization may cause community members, including victims, to overlook, excuse, or forgive acts of sexual and domestic violence. This then frustrates law enforcement's attempts to apprehend and punish perpetrators of these crimes.

Professionals and survivors I interviewed frequently had differing areas of expertise and experiences concerning sexual and domestic violence. As a result, while survivors spoke about multiple generations of trauma within their families, professionals stressed the difficulties in providing services within a vast region in the face of inadequate funding and understaffing. The transient nature of the rural Alaska workforce, in addition to the high volume of cases professionals handle, leaves professionals with daunting workloads. The continual turnover of

employees requires near-constant training, increasing the work load on longer term employees tasked with training incoming workers.

Survivors and professionals alike spoke in detail about the inadequacies of the state and federal legal systems as they apply to rural communities. Professionals expressed frustration as they encountered rural community members whom they felt exhibited distrust for the system they represented. They perceived that distrust sometimes filtered into tribal governments or Native non-profit organizations, leading the management of these organizations to interfere with efforts of safety officers they employ to comply with state legal standards. Nevertheless, professionals acknowledged the vital role that these safety officers fill, especially in the absence of state troopers, and the difficulties they face owing to the close family ties within these small communities.

Members of rural communities, on the other hand, expressed distrust of law enforcement officer's commitment to arrive on the scene of a crime in a timely manner, or before real damage had been done. This distrust stemmed partly from negative experiences with law enforcement personnel concerning lesser priority complaints and reports. Because state-funded law enforcement had not laid a groundwork of trust within their communities, these rural residents suggested they would hesitate to contact authorities with more serious complaints. Furthermore, many rural community members did not trust local frontline workers, from health aides to VPOs, to respond to their complaints in an efficient, professional, or confidential manner.

Based on insight drawn from my respondents, I have compiled solutions that I believe are attainable for professional offices in rural Alaska and that may help them to provide better quality services to their communities. These solutions include: 1) social abuse and crisis training for rural paraprofessionals, such as VPO's, TPO's and VPSO's, as well as health aides; 2) socio-

cultural training for frontline professional workers to educate them not only on the history of the region, but also on the interconnected and long-lasting effects of sexual and domestic violence; 3) improved communication between rural Alaska communities and the state agencies that serve them, possibly via a cultural liaison (this position could facilitate information exchange between rural communities and state agencies, and better express both parties' expectations, as well as the limitations of such professionals); 4) public education concerning the long term, complex, and multigenerational effects of sexual and domestic violence; and 5) rural community education and initiatives that emphasize the effects and interrelatedness of sexual and domestic violence and substance abuse, as well as preventative measures and proactive solutions. These solutions should be attainable for youth, and include discussions about healthy relationships and clear communication. Such a program should be integrated into school curriculums and after-school programs in small, rural communities. This education should reach the public, through various forums, to facilitate youth discussions concerning the long-term impacts and cyclical nature of violence, and to educate youth about ways to speak out against violent acts within their community. By emphasizing prevention and healthy relationships at a local level, youth may be able to change the violent norms in their home communities.

The conditions surrounding sexual and domestic violence are complex and multifaceted. Through my research I have learned that each contributing factor touches upon and compounds another. Due to this cyclicality, sexual violence, domestic violence, substance abuse, normalization, underreporting, multigenerational trauma, insufficient law enforcement and mental health services, and isolation intertwine to create toxic environments for survivors while simultaneously requiring high levels of professional expertise to respond to the needs of victims.

Both the survivors and professionals who spoke to me openly shared their experiences as well as their thoughts on causes and remedies to social problems in rural Alaska. The survivors of sexual or domestic violence who stepped forward to speak to me demonstrated incredible bravery in sharing their stories. I believe some of them did so to help process these events to further their own healing, while others expressed a desire to share their stories to help other survivors recognize that they are not alone, and that it is possible to move forward in the wake of such exploitation.

It is important to note that these participants' perspectives do not necessarily apply to rural communities as a whole, nor do they apply to all survivors of sexual and domestic violence. Nevertheless, these individuals' personal and professional experiences provide them valuable insight into conditions in rural communities that contribute to high rates of sexual and domestic violence. Additionally, I believe that their testimony has helped illuminate steps that can be taken to lessen the stigma for survivors, and increase aid for victims. I hope that communicating their experiences and perspectives, as well as offering my own analysis and recommendations, will contribute to a decline in such violence and improved well-being in rural Alaska.

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